

Fanmail

by pigeonattack

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Summary: They're being held at Studio 254, known to be quite possibly the most terrifying environment in the world- if one happens to land on their host's hit list. Their every answer is monitored and transcribed. Ask at your own risk.

1. Exposition: Studio 254

The response bestowed upon **_Les Amants de la Nuit _****totally reminded me how much I love writing for you guys (thank you thank you THANK YOU!). Right in the middle of that grin-like-a-lunatic phase that you fellow writers/readers all know all too well, Mom sent me off to do something that made me even happierâ€|**

â€|hang out the laundry!

Yay for spawn!

I don't know what it is about doing laundry outdoors, but something about shaking damp cloth and clipping socks to the clothesline is really inspiring.

Thusâ€|

â€|welcome to Fanmail.

* * *

><p>Exposition: Studio 254

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Headmaster's Office, HIVE

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"Good afternoon, Max."

Nero looked up to see his bodyguard standing in the doorway. "Ah, Natalya. Back from the Middle East so soon? I trust the operation when well."

Raven nodded. "That uncooperative oil baron will never hinder us again. Unfortunately, the situation in Libya has not improved. They are still grappling with the problem of installing a government to succeed Gadaffi, which creates an unstable climate that will greatly hinder any of our own interference."

"I presumed just as much." Nero laced his fingers. "What do you need?"

"I need to take Malpense, Brand, Trinity, Fanchu, Darkdoom, and Argentblum out of class. Oh, and those two new kidsâ€¦ their surnames escape meâ€¦"

"Indeed? What has that bunch gotten into this time?"

"You don't want to know."

"I don't doubt that. Go ahead."

"Thank you."

As she turned to leave, her face held a strange, un-Raven-ish smirk.

On the other side of the world, another Raven was still on an incredibly dÃ©jÃ vu-inducing assignment.

Flying Italian sauce-covered projectiles were involved.*

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Studio 254, Upper East Side, Manhattan

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The Shroud ride had been swift and uneventful, though the students kept trying to inquire regarding their destination. Now, nine people stood on the balcony of a New York penthouse overlooking Central Park.

"Whoa." Shelby muttered. "This place must cost a gazillion dollars in rent."

Raven opened the balcony doors. "GLOVE happens to _have_ a gazillion dollars. And then some."

The group stepped inside a wide, spacious room with modest furnishing, including nine off-white leather armchairs surrounding a small glass coffee table. Three of the walls boasted floor to ceiling windows with spectacular views of the Park and New York skyline. The fourth wall had an open door that led to the restroom. In the corner was a kitchenette.

"Nice place," Otto remarked. "Who lives here?"

"This is my studio," Raven answered.

"Studio?" Nigel asked. One would have a rather incongruent mental image of an assassin in a smock with an easel and paints.

"There are many types of studios."

That didn't answer much.

"Hey, Otto, remember that time at the orphanage when Shannon demanded a personal studio, and we fixed up that creaky old room in the back? Well, actually, you put me and Tom in charge of it and left to go do some 'thinking' and then one month later you were gone and never came backâ€|"

"I remember." Otto nodded.

"Who's Shannon?" asked Laura curiously.

Shelby waved her hand. "Just another one of Otto's former sweethearts, dear, no one for you to worry about."

"What? For one thing, there's absolutely no reason I should be worrâ€|"

"I am wondering when the food will be arriving, as it is being a rather long time since breakfast, ja?"

Raven fished out some food from the mini fridge, at which everyone ceased asking questions. As the Alphas settled into the armchairs, Raven went back to the balcony. A piece of paper was in her hand.

From a nearby treetop, a small figure with a black backpack slung over one shoulder lithely landed next to her. The newcomer wore inconspicuous jeans and a dark hoodie, but a mouse-eared (realistic mouse ears, not Mickey Mouse ears) brown headband perched on her head and a cute little tail flicked behind. Wings were attached to her sneakers at the ankles.

"Raven" handed her the piece of paper. "Copy and deliver. You know who the recipients are."

The other person nodded.

"By the way, what's with the get up?"

The other person shrugged. "I'm a mouse. The wings make me look moreâ€| Hermes-ish. Look, my backpack has painted wings, too."

"Wierdo."

"Shut up. It was your idea."

"Whatever. Now, hurry up."

The younger girl leapt back into the trees, where she paused, kneeling, to peruse the note.

_Hey, readers, _

It's been a little over one year since the first little hit on the traffic chart, twelve beautiful months of laughter and insanity.

I'm pretty sure you've been wondering when the day would come when someone would round up Otto, Wing, Laura, Shelby, and Nigel (and HIVEmind, I guessâ€¦ I mean, I DO have a blackbox) to answer your burning questions and hear what you have to say.

This will either be the most wonderful, ridiculous, or utterly stupid thing I've ever done, but I've put my life/sanity on the line many times before, so this is nothing new to me.

Here's how it'll work.

Each chapter, one Alpha will be taking fanmail (voluntarily or notâ€¦ either way, they don't get to choose, and I happen to have a few nifty vials of veritaserum lying around). This is to ease congestion, and give you more chances to ask stuff. For instance, Otto's the victim, er, subject of next chapter, so please just send Otto fanmail only.

Of course, normal reviews always make my week. *winkwink*

I only have a few guidelines and warnings. Please, to make my life a little more organized, one question and comment per review only. Additional requests will have to be put forth anonymously.

_Please review as soon as you can so the next chapter can get rolling. _

_As for the warningsâ€¦ _

I will NOT be editing any sloppy grammar, and the asker will NOT be anonymous. Obscene users will be banned. Don't embarrass yourself. Don't waste your time and my time, because if there's anything I can't stand, it's wasting time.

In addition, I cannot be held responsible for any mysterious casualties or disappearances resulting from an Alpha's response to a piece of fanmail.

Ask at your own risk.

_... _

_Enjoy!~ _

_;)pidge _

"Weirdo," muttered the girl.

Several pigeons on a nearby branch were glaring at her beadily, as if telling her to get to work.

Chocoholic Mouse rolled her eyes at them, but stood to leave nonetheless.

"It's hard work being pigeonattack's twelve year old little sister."

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Inside the bathroom of the studio, pigeonattack disdainfully pulled some wads of tissue from the sole of the combat boots that had been used to match her height to Raven's. Wiping off the makeup, but leaving the scar (cuz it looked cool and was the first time she'd done one since Halloween), she was reminded for the thousandth time why she never bothered with makeup unless she was performing. Which, coincidentally, was exactly what she'd been doing today.

As she yanked off the wig (ah, that felt better), a knock sounded at the door.

"Yes?" she called, changing her voice to match Raven's.

"Erm, I'm sorry to rush youâ€|" It was Franz. "â€| but I am really having to peeâ€|"

"I'm done," called pidge in her normal voice.

"Whaâ€|" "

The door opened. The Alphas looked up, all shocked, except for Shelby, who grinned. "Nice impersonation. I was wondering when someone would notice, besides me. Hey, you're from Alpha, aren't you?"

Pigeonattack wasn't surprised that the master of stealth/disguise had known. "Thanks, Shel. Yeah. I'm Alpha, though I'm not around much."

A million questions fired up at once.

"Who are you?"

"Where's Raven?"

"What'd you do to Raven? Forget that, how did you manage to subdue her?" Penny sounded very eager to know.

"What are you doing to us?"

"Screw that, I'm out of here."

"Nuh-uh," said pigeonattack, grabbing Otto's shoulder mid-escape attempt. "Everyone, sit. Please. I'll explain."

Wing was halfway to the door. "Why should we trust you? You abducted us from HIVE, taking us here without our consent."

"On the contrary, you seemed all too eager for a field trip a few hours ago."

"That was beforeâ€|" "

"Look," she said calmly. "You don't have a choice. But, if you wish, I'll give you one minute to attempt an escape."

They all looked at each other uncertainly.

Otto piped up. "She's just our age! Why's sheâ€" "

"I'm your age, and I happened to fool the HIVE headmaster himself. Can you say that much, Malpense? Remember theâ€| '_submarine_pen'_"

She'd hit a nerve. Otto snarled. "Well, I was only thirteenâ€" "

"And now you're not much older. I might not be a super genius like you, but it's _not_ smart to cross me. All I ask is for you toâ€" "

Franz spoke through a mouthful of chocolate. "Actually, I am being quite happy here."

"Franz!" Nigel admonished. "We'reâ€" "

"Going to be here for quite a while," finished their friendly host, waving her arms magnanimously. "So make yourselves comfy. As soon as everyone is seated, I can start explaining."

"When you say 'quite a while'," Laura asked nervously, "how longâ€|?"

Pidge shrugged. "As long as it takes for you to answer a few questions. Nothing scandalousâ€| I hope."

And before the wave of new questions could start up, she launched into her explanation.

Several minutes, a million questions, a lot of swearing, general indignance (but resignation), and a tray of chocolate later, Otto croaked, "Soâ€| I'm the first victim?"

"You got it," said pigeonattack. Otto did not look enthusiastic, but that wasn't her problem.

She passed around some previously unnoticed electronic tablets. "This is how you'll receive yourâ€| _fanmail._"

Laura nodded appreciatively. "Latest generation. Cool. The design of these things is so nice. I mean, it's really functional, but aesthetic, too."

"Glad you like. Otto, tap the mail icon."

The white haired Alpha did so.

"See anything?" pidge asked, smirking as she looked over.

His eyes were slowly moving down the screen, his already pale face going white as a sheet.

When he spoke, his voice was hoarse. "Uhâ€| yeahâ€| "

* * *

><p>*For additional details, please refer to the Epiclogue of "Pigeon's Prom".

—...—

To be continued.

__smirk__

2. Checkered

****Monster chapterâ€” fifteen pages of large-ness on Word.****

****Just saying.****

*****stares blankly at this gigantic-by-her-standards chapter*****

****Ahem. Shall we commence? Yes, I think we shall.****

â€|

*****deep breath, knocks on wood with the fury of a furious woodpecker*****

****Come what may, and may that which comes be dealt with in a manner of utmost courage and chivalry!****

* * *

><p>Chapter II

****.**

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Checkered**

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—.—

A few minutes passed in silence as pigeonattack graciously allowed everyone to catch their breath before the session officially started.

"Otto Malpense, you get your head out of that app." Shelby reached over, tapped the screen and home button of Otto's tablet a few times, and set it to the proper screen.

Otto frowned. "Hey. I'd almost gotten the candy to the little green monster."

"I assume he is trying to delay and distract himself from the work at hand," Tom said, smirking.

"Don't blame you," pidge nodded, though there was little sympathy in her voice.

Laura leaned forward. "Shall we start?"

"Yea," Nigel said. "This will be very interesting."

Otto shot them both dirty looks, then stood and proclaimed loudly, "I have to facilitate the facilities."

"No, you don't." Penny crossed her arms, an evil grin on her face. "You used it fifteen minutes ago, when pidge was outside."

Ah, thought pidge. How nice it was that everyone was so supportive of her—though of course, once they got a taste of what was to come, this good-natured-ness was unlikely to last long. "Otto, you ain't goin' nowhere. Relax, dear, tension will only make it worse. You should be grateful for the fact that you are going first."

"I should be grateful for being the sacrificial starter?"

"No. You should be grateful that once this is over, you get to sit around and laugh yourself to tears at everyone else's suffering without having a nasty raincloud of foreboding over your head. Though I don't understand why you have any reason to be worried in the first place. It's an honor to have such wonderful fans and wonderful mail."

"I don't feel any better."

"Not my problem. So. Who wants to read the first piece?"

Four hands shot up- Penny, Franz, and two of Shelby's.

"Aw, Shel, that's cheating," Penny complained as pigeonattack leaned back in her chair and pointed a pencil in Shelby's direction.

Shelby stuck out her tongue. "Ahem. This one's from Writey Starkid. Hey pidge, who are these people?"

"Various streamers."

"They're HIVE students?"

"Uh-huh." Pidge waved her pencil. "Carry on, please."

"Hm. Okay."

Ooooh, this looks fun :D Oh, I know that grin-like-a-lunatic phase all too well.

I shall ask Otto...if he's ever considered using black hair dye to make himself look like a skunk. Or a zebra. Or a snow leopard.

-RL"

Shelby beamed so brightly it could have blinded the sun. "Awesome—"

"No." Otto immediately deadpanned. "No, no, and no."

"That is a lie."

"YOU TELL HIM, WING!"

"Please keep your voice down, Shelby. We are indoors."

"Skunk? Zebra? Snow leopard?" Otto paused. "Okay, maybe the snow leopard, but where the heck would I get black hair dye in a place like HIVE?"

Nigel shrugged. "You guys come up with the weirdest things in the lab. Hair dye's not that difficult to synthesize."

Penny and Laura were both staring at Otto, as if imagining exotic patterns on his hair.

"Not a good look," Penny muttered.

"Can I be reading next?" Franz asked excitedly.

"Hey!" Penny protested.

Pigeonattack waved her hand. Her pencil had taken up residence on the coffee table.

Franz cheered. "Danke! This one's from Fidelity."

So...Otto's first huh? :D

Hmmm...what to do?...well, for one, I have a question for you, and Otto~

If you had only 24 hours left to live, what would you do? (except plan for ways not to die of course)

"24 hours?" Otto asked, relief at the innocence of the question evident in his voice. "Umâ€¦ Wow, that's a good question! Hmâ€¦"

"Oh, come on, Otto." Shelby flopped back, staring straight at the ceiling. "We _all_ know _exactly_ what you'd doâ€¦"

"Right, of course, I'd first finish the blueprints for the mega-efficient fusion core for the benefit of future generationsâ€¦"

"Um, I don't think so," Shelby sang. "If it's your last day on Earth, you'd wanna do everything you'd never do if you had your future to consider..."

"â€¦and then I'd probably act upon the impulses I have been suppressing since I first came to HIVE."

"HMM?" Laura, Penny, Shelby, Franz, and pigeonattack all sat up straighter. Oh, yesssâ€¦

"I'd blow up the grappler cavern and watch all the platforms go _snap-snap-snap_ one by one and _crash_ to the water below!"

"Oh." Five disappointed looking faces accompanied five sagging spines.

"You lie," Shelby said flatly. "Pidge, shall we procure the truth

serum?"

"Veritaserum? Nah, not yet. I have a limited amount. We'll find plenty of opportunities to use it later. Don't you worry."

"Okee."

"I'm next!" announced Penny, shaking off her stupor of disappointment. "From Aranel Azamai. What a pretty name!

Ahhhhh! Fanmail to the fab four! There's a ton of this for Harry Potter, but I haven't seen any for H.I.V.E. Are we just allowed to ask them questions? Are they allowed to be pointless questions? Because I think that's all I can come up with._

Hmm... Otto...

How about...

Otto, do you prefer Harry Potter or Twilight? Which is your favorite character in your favorite, and why? Others might think this is pointless, but maybe it matters to me!- Aranel"

"Far from pointless," Otto immediately declared. "Harry Potter. Duh."

Choruses of "Yeah," and "Hear, hear!" echoed around the room from everyone but Franz.

"Can I go next?" asked Laura.

Pidge nodded. "Hm-hm."

"This one's from Vordax0110.

Awesome! so I guess I'll have a go.:D_

Which do you prefer Naruto or Yu-gi-oh?~Vordax."

"Umâ€|" Otto scratched his head. "Those names ring a bellâ€|"

"We sometimes watched those at the orphanage when we were little," Tom remembered. "Well, by 'we' I mean the othersâ€|" I mean, I watched Naruto every now and then, but you were never really into TVâ€|"

"Colonel Francisco calls TV the 'Idiot Box'," Franz noted.

Shelby snorted. "Take it from the guy with a giant stash of Friends under his desk."

"Hey, hey, stop butting in! This is my moment of glory," Otto suddenly exclaimed.

That was unexpected.

It seemed Otto was getting rather confident (/pleased about the attention) with answering fanmail. It was understandable. His mail had all been rather innocent. So far.

"So." Otto sat up straighter. "I like the art in Naruto. I've never watched either show, but from what I saw of Naruto's art, it was pretty good."

"Hm-hm," pigeonattack nodded. "Next!"

Wing sat forward. "I will take this one." Glancing at the contents, he smiled. "From Schnizel."

_Heheh! Great idea! :D Erm... Question for Otto: Do you believe in the supernatural and if you do can you prove that its real?
:D"_

Wing pronounced the :D emoticon as 'semicolon-capital-D'.

Shelby sighed in exasperation. "Wing, dear, do you or do you _not_ understand the concept of emoticons?"

"I understand that they are one of the factors of butchery of the English language."

"Hey!" pigeonattack frowned. "I personally like emoticons. They add color. Granted, skillful word usage does the same, but emoticons are fun! They're _nowhere_ as bad asâ€"

Otto mercifully cut off her tirade before everyone could get an earful of Pigeon Philosophy. "No, I do not believe in the supernatural. Sorry. Laura would agree. Our universe is based on rationally and mathematically proven principles. Sound knowledge and reasoning." He turned to the redhead. "Right?"

Laura nodded. "Yup."

Penny pouted. "Fairies are fun."

"In your mind, aye, but don't tell me you actually believe in themâ€|"

"Maybe I do." Penny lifted her chin proudly.

"That's soâ€|"

"Sheesh, Laura," Franz muttered in wonder, as Penny and Laura argued over the existence of fairies and Otto watched bemusedly. "When did _you_ get so irritable?"

"She's only prickly and irascible around _her_," Shelby whispered loudly.

Franz paused. Then he smiled a smile that would have frightened Cupid out of his diaper. "_Ja._"

"Uh-huhâ€|" Shelby laughed lightly, throwing her head back. Ah, the joy of watching such things unfold, egging on various components of the grand soap drama.

"Nigel's turn!" pidge interrupted the increasingly intensifying verbal battle.

Nigel nervously scrolled to the next message. "Um, okay." He paused, looking slightly alarmed. His eyes clearly screamed, "Good heavens, why am I stuck with this one?" Pigeonattack pitied him but not enough to intervene.

"This one's from Diamond Ninja"

"Dear Otto,"

Seriously. You made me SOOO mad. I hate when guys do stuff like that. You could've just confessed your feelings for Shelby back in book, like, one, and now you're stuck in the "Jessie's Girl" zone. Should've spoken up when you had the chance.

Kinda sorry for you, but still really irritated,

Kuno!

"What the WHAT?"

"Say WHAT?"

Identical looks of incredulity were frozen on Otto and Shelby's faces as pigeonattack doubled over, shaking with fits of "something" Penny snickered loudly, though looking none-too-pleased. Laura stared at her best friend with a heart wrenching expression of betrayal.

Pigeonattack composed herself. "Reread it if you want, Nigel."

"No, thanks." Nigel appeared to be attempting to put as much distance between himself and the mayhem that was on the verge of breaking out. He had made it to the balcony door.

"Listen here, Diamond Ninja, you've got this all wrong," Shelby said breathlessly, shooting Laura a worried glance. "If I had to pick one boy in this room, it would most certainly NOT be the albino-freak."

"HEY!"

"So, Otto, you do like Shelby!~" pigeonattack drew a happy-tilde in the air.

"No, dammit, no!" Otto seemed absolutely horrified at the thought. "Actually, I"

Laura, Penny, Tom, and Franz all straightened in their seats.

"You" prompted Tom, beaming kindly.

"You look like a psychiatrist, Tom."

"Thank you, Penny."

"I am a bachelor forever. I don't need love"

"LIES!" Tom, Franz, and pigeonattack exclaimed in unison (Shelby would have joined the chorus, but she was too busy glaring rusty

daggers at the tablet).

"Shall we get the Veritaserum?" Tom asked pidge, smiling cordially.

She sighed. "Unfortunately, I am only authorized to use it when it directly relates to the question. And we all know Otto really likesâ€"

"Well, guess what?" Otto shouted. "I'll be single forever! No romance for me!"

"LIES!"

"Moooving _on_â€|" Laura said loudly.

Tom sighed. "You poor, oblivious soulsâ€| Very well. I shall read next." He coughed. "This next piece is from I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly." And then he paused. "Wow. This is long."

"Get on with it, good sir." Pigeonattack smiled. "I think you'll really enjoy this one. And Shelby. And Franz."

"Ooh, I am liking the sound of this," gushed Franz.

Shelby leaned forwards with her elbows on her knees and hands clasped, gazing intently in the reader's direction and motioning for Wing to do the same.

Wing refrained.

"_Upper East Side, Manhattan...that address rings a bell...IT'S WHERE PERCY JACKSON LIVES! Now if only the studio number was '394'...;)"_

Tom paused. "Who's Percy Jackson?"

Shelby and pidge gasped in unison. Tom eyed them warily, but continued.

"_To: O. Malpense_

From: Fly ()

Dear (albino/clone/genius/Artemis Fowl II Part 2/organic supercomputer/Laura's boyfriend, I guess/Alpha/sort of leader of the fab four) Otto,

This is something that's been on my mind ever since I found out you gave the little girls whom you lived with at the orphanage a TV. This question nagged even more when it became clear that you and Penny were quite close when you were younger.

DON'T try to deny the fact that you've watched some of them. EVERY little girl watches them. And if they were played on the telly you gave them 24/7, there's no way you didn't end up watching a bit out of the corner of your eye.

You've guessed what I'm talking about, haven't you? You should

have.

Barbie movies.

Yeah, you heard (or read, I guess...?) correctly. Out of all the things there are to ask, I ask about Barbie movies.

Plus, little Penny would have dragged you to watch them with her. I have a little cousin, and I have firsthand experience on how little girls can make you sit in front of the TV and watch those annoying, sickly sweet Barbie movies. There's a boy in my class who knows even the LYRICS to the songs in Diamond Castle, because he has a little sister.

So I want you to tell me: Which was the best out of all those movies and why? And no saying "I never watched them" because there's no way that's true, and no saying "All of them were equally bad and my favourite was the shortest one" or whatever.

Answer properly. I don't know where you live, but pidge has you hostage. Remember that.

~Fly~"

Laura's mouth was opening and closing in the relative mannerism of a goldfish. Penny was smiling to herself in reverie. Shelby had excused herself sometime after "Barbie movies", and now stood on the balcony epileptically doubling over. Tom was silently rereading to make sure he'd gotten it right, Franz looked dreamy, and Nigel had excused himself to use the restroom (sometime after "Barbie movies"). Wing seemed to have tuned them all out.

Throughout the reading, Otto's face had gone from confused to scandalized to nervous to proud to affrontment to a culmination of resignation. "Um, first I'd like to sayâ€|"

"Laura's b-boyfriend?" Laura managed to sputter. "What kind ofâ€|"

"Yes, we were rather close," Penny reminisced. "I remember I used to haul him into the playroom to watch "Swan Lake" and "The Nutcracker" around Christmastime ["Yes, I like those," pidge mused], and sometimes when I was cold, we'd go upstairs and drag down a blanket, andâ€|" She trailed off. "It was nice."

"Excuse me," said Laura heatedly, leaping up and breezing by Shelby, who'd just come in through the doorway.

"Oy, what'd I miss?"

"I haven't even gotten to say what I wanted to say," Otto said annoyedly, "which was that, yes, I've watched Barbie movies, but none of them struck me as particularly enlightening, with the possible exception of the Three Musketeers. I had no idea kittens could wield swords."

"Hm-hm." Shelby took her seat. "And I expect that after watching that one, you immediately decided to attempt to train a private feline army for your very own."

"No."

Shelby shrugged. "It'd be worth a try, at least. What's up with Laura? Oh, was it the boyfriend thing?"

Several voices gave the affirmative. At the reminder of the way he'd been addressed, Otto gave a start. "Oh, yeah, and just to remind you, I'm _nobody's_ boyfriend."

Pidge muttered "_Odysseus_" at the same time Shelby coughed "_Annabethalreadyhasaboyfriend,dummy_". The two girls gazed at each other in mutual respect.

"These peopleâ€|" Shelby pointed at the tablet
"â€|rock."

Pigeonattack nodded. "They _sure_ do."

"Who's Artemis Fowl II?" asked Franz. "I think I recognize the nameâ€| Father may have mentioned himâ€|"

Shelby gasped for the millionth time that day, staring around at the inhabitants of the room. "Is NOBODY here cultured?"

"It depends upon your definition of 'cultured', Shelby," Wing replied.

"Y'all don't know Percy, y'all don't know Artemis Fowlâ€|"

"Hush," pidge soothed. "All in good time. There's just a few more to get through. Who's up?"

"I believe everyone has read." Tom nodded. "Yes, we've come full circle."

"I'll go!" Penny volunteered eagerly. "From Firebird..."

"Who, what's with all these Russian ballet references lately?"

"Quiet, Otto."

Otto,

You are awesome! (so is Shelby) Back to my question... What do you think of Raven? Are you scared of her? Annoyed with her? Thankful for her? etc. I just want your opinion. I hope you aren't mad at me for asking. Firebird.

Shelby hugged her tablet in an attempt to send the anon inquirer a hug. "You too, friend."

Otto pondered this. "Well, she's Russianâ€|"

"Yes, we know." Laura seemed to have recovered and reentered the room.

"Oh, hi, Laura!" Otto waved cheerily. "Umâ€| where was I? Oh, yes, Raven is Russian and Russians are not very pleasant ['You kidding?'" pidge interjected. "Russians are awesome."], from my experiences, but

she can be really cool. I mean, she's saved our lives countless times, so, yes, you could say I'm rather thankful for that. She can be VERY annoyingâ€"

He froze.

"Um, she's not hearing this, is she?"

"Never you worry," said pigeonattack. "Everything that happens in this room is STRICTLY confidential."

Shelby sneezed.

Otto continue, looking rather relieved. "Oh, good. Yes, Raven always seems to drop in when you don't want her tooâ€| isn't that right, Wing?" He smiled softly at the memory. "Don't you remember that one time Raven woke you up? You were having _such_ a pleasant dream, tooâ€|"

Wing frowned. "How do you know about this?"

Otto resisted the urge to dance around gleefully. "Yes! Yes, you remember!"

Shelby sat up. "You better have that on camera, Malpense."

"You were there?"

"Of course I was there, Wing, Raven needed my help in passing on the message."

"I do not understand, nor do I want to."

"Otto. I want that video."

"Sure, sure, Shelbyâ€| But that was a story for another day. "Yeah, so Raven's generally cool. And no, Firebird, I'm not mad at you for asking. Why would I be? That's a perfectly innocent question. Thank you for that."

"Next!" Pigeonattack announced. "I'll read this one myself. This is from Law of Universal Gravitation."

"Oh, excellent." Otto rubbed his hands together. "_Finally_ some intelligent conversation."

Pidge smirked.

"_Otto. I am not here to talk about physics. Sorry._"

I suppose my name is often rather deceptive.

Do you sing? Of course you sing. I'm sure you've got iTunes loaded in that brain of yours, so it'd be inexcusable for you not to be able to sing.

Hah-hah. You'd make a cool boombox.

...

Maybe.

Here's the question: which one of your acquaintances would you most like to sing to, and what song?

Chillax; it don't have to be no love song. Just a song. Any song.

"

The previous looks of disappointment on the majority's faces had immediately riveted.

"Iâ€|am not a boombox."

"Oh?"

"Yes, that's right, Shelby, it may strike you as odd, but I am not a music playing appliance."

"Answer the question, please," Tom implored, looking very interested.

"First of all, I do not sing."

"Yes, you do," Wing said simply, reaching out a hand to stop pigeonattack from subtly procuring a rather unknowable-looking bottle.

"I do not."

"Yes, you do. In the shower."

"Well, so do you!"

"You are admitting it!" Franz exclaimed gleefully.

"Ooh, Otto, pray tell what Wing sings in the shower!"

"Well, Shelby, he mostly sings about this particularâ€"

"I sing in the shower," Tom commented. "It's fun. I feel like there's no one's watching, no one's listeningâ€"

"â€"but we all do," Penny said. "'Specially back at the orphanage..."

"â€"and afterwards I feel refreshed and then I walk out of the showers and there's always a posse of girls standing around with their ears to the door, for some reasonâ€|"

"So, Otto," interrupted Laura. "What would you sing, and who'd you sing to?"

Otto bit lip. "I likeâ€| Green Day."

"FTW Americano!"

"Yes, Shelby, they're American."

"What's 'F-T-W'?"

"I'll explain later, dearest Wing."

"Both of you, let me answer the darn question!" Otto huffed. "So, anyways, like I was saying, I like Green Day. 'American Idiot' is a pretty cool song"

"Nah, 'Last of the American Girls' is cooler"

"and I'd sing it in Shelby's face."

"You bloody little snot."

"Meh."

"Was Otto just saying 'meh'?"

"Mehhh" Tom laughed. "You sound like an alpaca!"

"With the right accent and inflection, 'meh' means 'sesame seeds' in Vietnamese. Although it's not spelled m-e-h." All eyes riveted to pigeonattack, who shrugged and grinned like a cucumber with quirky shoulders. "Moving on! Second to last question." Otto smiled in quasi-relief.

Tom's hand shot up into the air.

"Hear ye, we have a volunteer!"

"Thank you, fair maid."

"mental image too many frills"

"Maiden. Lady. Whatever." Tom cleared his throat as pigeonattack tapped her head firmly, attempting to dislodge the maid-outfit mental conception. "From :

Dear Otto,

There are many questions I would like to ask but I think this one is the most important. How do you get into H.I.V.E? It sounds like such an interesting place. You tried to escape there, I would hate (actually love) to think of what you would do to most public schools. Everyone at H.I.V.E. is of considerable intelligence. Even henchman stream. Most people around me are full, complete and utter idiots. I also would like to thank you for being an inspiration to villainous children everywhere.

Sincerely,
>Invader Tor."<p>

"Yes!" Otto exclaimed delightedly. "I am an INSPIRATION! Thank you, Invader Tor!"

"Yes, yes," Laura said. "We all know how very inspiring you are, but for entirely the wrong reasons"

Otto cut her off. "Ah, public schools the things I would have done had I remained there, rather than going off on my special

regimenâ€| "

There was a silence as everyone pondered the public school scenario, which many of them had been through and, through their individual handlings, had more or less enjoyed.

"As for how I got into HIVEâ€| "

"Isn't that what Book One's all about?"

Everyone turned to their host, who was frowning as if trying to dredge up a distant memory.

"Huh? 'Book One'?" Tom asked.

Pigeonattack waved her hand (been doing that a lot, lately) in a _nah-don't-worry-about-it_ manner. "Nah, don't worry about it."

Otto cleared his throat. "Anyways, _that_ information is classifiedâ€| "

Pidge sneezed.

"â€|but I can tell you that it involved a robot spider, the orphanages-across-Britain-are-being-shut-down situation, the PM, and a rather shocked audience, which happened to include HIVE."

"That sounds like the stuff of fiction," Nigel said softly, slightly in awe.

Pigeonattack sneezed again.

"Dang, what's with all that sneezing?" Shelby looked concerned.

"Never mind that. Final question for Mister Otto Malpense! Would Shelby like to read?"

The addressee of the offer took once glance at the final message on her screen before cackling gleefully. "Oh, this one is _so_ mine."

"Aye, Ma'am, take it away.~"

"Thanks, pidge!~"

Nigel cringed. Oh, for the love of pancakes, would those two _please_ stop with the happy tildes. He could practically _see_ them floating around their speakers like odd, out-of-place clouds of squiggly lines. He wearily rubbed his glasses.

"Malpense, my friend, your final piece of fanmail is from a delightful soul by the name of ArtisticNeko, whose salutations consist of a

Request for Otto:

Play the Pocky game!

[preferablywithascottiejustcuz]

Luvya!"

"Good grief," Wing and Tom facepalmed and sighed at the same time, causing them to look at each other in mutual surprise and empathy for the albino.

"Someone's been an otakuâ€|" Pigeonattack furrowed her eyebrows. "But that's cool."

Shelby had sprung up from her seat and rushed/danced over to Laura, whispering something in her ear that made her go rather red.

Otto looked confused, and slightly terrified. "What's the pocky game? Why with a 'scottie'?"

Laura looked like she wanted to sink right through the armchair and the floor (and, therefore, into the apartment below, which may or may not have pleased the tenant, who at the moment was cooking a lovely stew directly below the scottie).

Penny frowned. "Pocky game, pocky gameâ€| I think I've heard that somewhereâ€|"

"It's an anime/manga trope of sorts," pidge explained unhelpfully.

"Indeedâ€|" Wing murmured. "I came upon it several times, growing up in Japan."

Tom nodded sagely. "It's a pretty cool game. Hard to get people to do it, though, unless they're alreadyâ€|"

"How about we save it for Laura's turn?" pigeonattack suggested. "That wayâ€|" She trailed off, deep in thought.

Tom's eyes gleamed. They could have been mistaken for gemstones of a very dark, very evil nature.

Likeâ€| black diamonds!

Tom liked black diamonds very much.

"I agreeâ€|" he mused. "I think it will work out better. We've spent enough time on Otto."

"Who's next, then?" Laura looked a little fearful. Everyone did, at varying degrees.

"Not me, not me, please let it not be me, I am needing to be mentally preparing myself for my hour of limelightâ€|" Franz murmured it like a mantra.

Pigeonattack nodded. "Sounds like a plan, Franz. Our next batch of fanmail will be for the one who seems most eagerâ€|and rightfully so!~"

And she looked meaningfully over at Tom, whose excited expression froze. Like ice. Which, as it happens can crack.

The ice, that is.

"You, my awesome, awesome friend, areâ€" Hey, no need to look so freaked out. Seriously! This will be _fun_."

Insert :D emoticon. And another happy-tilde.

* * *

><p>To be continued...

3. Pink

**Yeah, you may have noticed a few changes in the chapter names/formatting. I like it better this way.
>

Anyone else quagmired in the horrendous end-of-term Quicksand of Schoolwork? I know lots of you are; it's fun to complain to each other in mutual discontent, isn't it? My workload's starting to rival the Himalayas, but it's all gonna be over soon, so I say **_cheers to a better future**_**.

It feels totally awesome to write for such gracious readers, anyway, so I've really no excuse to whine and stuff. XD

* * *

><p>Chapter III

.

Pink

_.
>

"Can't we, like, take a potty break or something?"

For some odd reason, Tom did not seem particularly keen to jump right in.

"Y'all's are gonna break the potty what with all the potty-ing that's been going on," Shelby commented. "I mean, people have come and gone through that threshold every time something remotely awkward went a'happenin'."

"We're jumping right in," pidge explained, "because jumping is more elegant than crashing, but less stiff than trotting."

"That made little to no sense," Nigel murmured, though not loudly enough for pigeonattack's eyes to glint red or something.

"I'll start," Laura said politely, as Tom fell back into his armchair with a resigned sigh, back of his hand coming to a rest on his forehead (_"Drama queen,"_ Penny said fondly).

Pigeonattack glanced at the message, smiled with great happiness, and then pointed to the middle of the text. "Please start here. Birdkid,

you're awesome!~"

Laura cocked her head in mild confusion, but went along.

"_So, Tom :3_"

What is the most embarrassing thing that had happened to you while you were in the orphanage with Otto? Knowing you guys, a whole bunch of fantastic events must have occurred!"

"I can answer that," Otto and Penny said simultaneously, before looking at each other and giving identical expressions of glee and nostalgia (and, yes, glee and nostalgia _can_ mix together; the two emotions make a lovely _pastiche_).

"Ooh, please do!" Shelby's eyes glinted.

"Once, when we were very young, just wee lads and lassies, the three of usâ€¦"

"Oh, noâ€¦" Tom groaned.

Penny paused. "You don't even know what I'm going to say!"

"Iâ€¦ don't like the sound of it."

"Your problem, not ours. _Anyways_â€¦ where was I?"

"You three were wee little squirts."

"Thank you, Shelby! Yes, we were wee littleâ€¦ _squirts_. It was a lovely day, as few are in London, most unfortunatelyâ€¦"

"It ain't no California!"

"Shush, Shelby," Laura admonished. "Let her speak."

"California is the land of my heart," pidge mused distractedly. "Sometimes I wonder why I didn't select a studio in Frisco, instead of Manhattanâ€¦ But of course, Percy lives down the blockâ€¦"

"WHAT?" Shelby jumped up. "Gah! No way, girl!"

"_Anyways_," pigeonattack continued loudly. "You were saying, Penny?"

"It was a lovely day, as few are in London-"

"_Ain't no California!~_"

"Shut up, Shel."

"And Otto decided he was going to take over Piccadilly Circus."

"Wow!" Franz looked at Otto with newfound respect. "I had no idea you have been cherishing ambitions to be a ringmaster!"

"It's a borough in London, Franz," Nigel explained wearily. "Not an

actual circus."

"Huh." Shelby chewed on that bit of food for thought.

"Anyways, I don't like camels," added Otto.

"Just finish the story, already." Tom flung himself over the back of his armchair so he was draped as one would drape a wet raincoat.

"And so we brought him the necessary papers. You know, title deeds, records, the like. Not too difficult."

"How old were you at the time?" Laura asked.

"Eh... Seven? Eight? Yeah, so anyway, that wasn't too difficult. No, the hard part was getting the high-ups to take Otto seriously. Cuz even then, he was a shortyâ€¦"

Shelby reached over to ruffle their resident shorty's hair.

"â€¦but even then, he also commanded quite an aura. So we ended up buying out three or four of the firms on Clarge's, and everything was dandy untilâ€¦"

Tom moaned.

"â€¦Tommy here bungled everything. You see, as most eight year olds would have in his position (you've got to cut him a little slack, being at that age and all), he decided it would be just grand to hijack a billboard, which he went ahead and did without Otto's permission. Thus, while the dudes in charge of the billboards were busily scratching their heads over how to rid the Square of obscene depictions Tom found on Google Images, Otto was most displeased. Thus, he modified many of the pictures."

And Penny paused to let their imaginations run.

"Moving on!" yelled Tom, waving his arms around.

Wing quietly raised his hand, and upon receiving the universal you-may-proceed cue (a nod), he read the next piece. "This one is from .

Dear Tom,

A couple questions. They may not seem intelligent because I have not gotten to Aftershock (you do not need to know what that is) yet. Some Otto-related. Sorry. What is the weirdest thing Otto ever asked you for? Furthermore, what is your deepest darkest hatred? All villains have them, no matter how hard you try to deny.

Sincerely, Invader Tor."

Tom leaned back in his chair, rubbing his temple. "Two questions?" He looked at pigeonattack. "That's not fair, is it?"

"Fair."

"Ugh. Ah, well, they aren't so bad, I supposeâ€¦" He took a sip of

conveniently located water. "Umâ€¦ what's 'Aftershock'?"

"You do not need to know what that is."

"â€¦Fine. Weirdest thing Otto's ever asked me for?"

"Wait a sec, shouldn't that question be taking place during _my_ turn? It's me-related! _I_ should answer it! This is so not fair."

"Fair."

"_Anyway_," Tom said loudly. "I remember the time he woke me up in the middle of the night and asked forâ€¦ _advice_."

"Ooh, what kind?" asked Shelby, little pink hearts dancing behind her eyes.

"_Dating_ advice."

"I did _not_!" Otto protested. "It was _so_ not dating advice! I merely wished to inquire the best way to sugar a girl into handing over some informationâ€¦"

"Over tea. _Tea_, Otto, _tea._"

"Tea is classy!"

Wing nodded in silent agreement.

Tom continued with bravado. "Penny would _never_ fall for that, anywaysâ€¦"

"This was with _Penny_?"

"Laura, darling," Shelby said, patting the redhead's shoulder. "It's okay. It's all gonna be okay."

"Bugger off, Shel."

"As for my _deepest, darkest, hatredâ€¦_"

"Spiders!" exclaimed Penny.

"Of course, not. That's ridiculous."

"_Ja_," agreed Franz. "Spiders are keeping nasty insects from tromping all over the food."

"My _deepest, darkest, hatredâ€¦_ is ignorance."

There was a silence. No one had really expected something genuine to come out of his mouth. Slowly, pigeonattack began to clap. There was a smattering of applause as others joined in.

"Not ignorance in _general_, though," Tom continued, relishing his moment of glory. "I detest the ignorance that blinds and prejudices, that leads one to act to the detriment of others. I guess it really all comes down to _ignorance with arrogance._"

"Hui, dixisti pulchre!"

Otto glanced warily at pidge. "You speak Latin?"

"That was a quote. Terence. Great guy, almost as awesome as Cicero."

Which didn't answer his question.

Laura cleared her throat. "Onwards. This is fromâ€|
pidgey-oh.

Here's my question for Tommy: Do you secretly want to play the pocky game with Shelby? Answer truthfully; I know you want to! *waggles eyebrows* But you know, Shelby's better off with an Asiâ€|"

Laura trailed off, a tiny smirk tugging at her mouth. "Meh.. I won't read the rest of it."

The cessation was most likely due to Shelby's expression.

"Good grief, girl," pidge moaned. "One of these days, I'm just gonnaâ€|"

"I wonder if this is being the same person as the one who requested the pocky game with Otto," Franz mused, ever astute.

"It is," pidge said wearily. "Yes, it is. We share a roof."

Shelby politely excused herself to use the restroom.

("Hypocrite!" Otto declared.)

Nigel reached behind his glasses to rub his bleary eyes.

"Listen," said pidge. "We ain't gonna be playin' no pocky game here none. For _one_ thing, that's a terribly overused trope that completely destroys plot with its clichÃ©d idiocy, and for _another_, it's absolutely _unlikely_ that _anyone_ in _any_ piece of writing would agree to play such a game with someone with whom they are already experiencing tumultuous feelings, positive or negative."

"It was just a question," said Franz.

"MOVING ON."

"Fire asks," Shelby began,

Tom, where do you picture yourself in ten years? â€"Fire"

Tom's answer was scarily immediate. "Riding a Lamborghini through the jungles of Madagascar en route to my new southern hemispherical base of operations."

Franz jumped in. "This is from the bluekangaroo:

Tom, Tommy, Thomas. What to ask, what to ask. Ah I know. What is your biggest fear?"

"What's with all these deep, introspective questions? I'm totally

drained of all my philosophical-ness."

"Answer the question," Nigel intoned.

"Biggest fear? That'd have to beâ€¦"

"Spiders!" exclaimed Penny.

"What is the _matter_ with you, woman?"

Penny shrugged. "Hey, you totally freaked out that one time I relocated a spidey to your pillow."

"I didn't want to crush it with my head! You put it in great danger by leaving it there."

Penny twirled a lock of pink hair. "I knew you'd see it, so technically, I wasn't jeopardizing it or anythingâ€¦"

"Answer the question," Nigel intoned.

"So much parallel structure happening," pidge noted.

Tom paused. "I fear pain."

Shelby looked disappointed. "You would never make a good GLOVE operative, buddy."

"It's funny, though," Tom went on. "Pain itself doesn't hurt me much, but the _prospect_ of pain isâ€¦ _scary_."

After a pause, there was a general chorus of _Yeah_ and _I know_.

Tom seemed to be enjoying playing the guru, but he motioned for someone to read the next piece.

Franz picked up his tablet. "From Rexiel23:"

I am really loving this whole fanmail thing. :D

Dear Tom, who do you envy most out of the people in the room and why?"

Pidge smiled. "It's the fanmail-sender-people who make it awesome."

"Yet _another_ philosophical-introspective question!" Tom moaned bemusedly.

"I am sure you are envying me the most," Franz babbled reasonably. "I have money, power, a rich (in many ways!) heritage, social status, girlsâ€¦"

"Actually, I envy Wing."

Wing looked up. "Oh?"

"Yes. He seems to be the only one besides our gracious host who has managed to keep cool as a cucumber in a refridgerator."

"I am bilingual, am not on Raven's hitlist (last I checked), can dance"

"Ah thank you." Wing made no comment as regards to the axiom.

Shelby nodded. "You're pretty cool indeed, big guy."

"and moreover, my name is awesome." With that, the Great and Mighty Franz ended his spiel.

Nigel scrolled down his tablet. "Oh, dear. The next one is long."

"Oh, goody, it must be Fly!" pigeonattack looked positively delighted.

"Do I read the whole thing?"

"Please."

Nigel looked torn between giggly and sick (a very funny combo on his face) as he scanned through the message. "Um, like I said, it's long"

Pidge threw up her arms. "Gah, just read the part addressed to Tom, then. Y'all can read the other awesome sections on your own, later. Except you two." She pointed to Otto and Shelby. "Don't read it."

They immediately started reading it.

"From I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly:" Nigel began hesitantly.

"_To: T. Ransom_"

"_From: Fly_"

"_Dear Tom R._"

"_I like calling you Tom R. so that people don't think I'm talking about Tom from Tom & Jerry or Tom Thumb or any other lame Toms. Because you're definitely NOT lame. And because they might think I'm talking about Tom Riddle._"

"_And if ANYONE SAYS 'Who's Tom Riddle?' I will ground you to chunks and feed you to the cat. Or I'll introduce you to Mr Ploopinschnooker. He's my pet shark._"

"_What? I like watching the expressions of people when they realize I have a pet shark named Mr Ploopinschnooker._"

"_Right. Your question: How do I pick a lock? Because Shelby won't tell (she'll say 'trade secret') and I've discovered that credit cards and hairpins only get you yelled at by dad and mom respectively._"

"_Or is it one of those first hand demonstration things? It probably is. Email me a video or something. In the meantime, your"

question: _

_Which love song, in your opinion, is perfect for Otto and Laura? Besides the song 'He Is An Obtuse Bozo Who Doesn't Kiss Her Even Though She's Made Her Feelings Perfectly Clear' by Ottra4Eva. __It's not a real song yet, but Rachel Elizabeth Dare assures me that one day it will be Track 07 of the 'The Redhead and the Albino' album._

That's all. I'm letting you off easy, partially because I think you're A-W-E-S-O-M-E (although we haven't seen much of you yet) and because I don't ship you and Penny. I originally thought you were a brother-sister duo."

Nigel stammered to a finish and excused himself. Politely. Desperately.

Another pregnant silence filled the room, seeping mirthlessly into every corner, every crevice.

"Tom Thumb," said Penny. "Tom Thumb."

Tom Ransom was too busy smirking over in Otto (and Laura)'s direction to notice and comment.

Otto was too busy staring at the tablet in an extremely disconcerting mannerâ€¦

"No, no!" pigeonattack yelled, realizing the direness of the situation at the exact same time Shelby did, and both girls jumped up and tackled him to the floor, singing exotic 60s music to mess up his thought process and interrupt the connection. Franz hurried over the tablet, the poor victim of Otto's mental assault.

"Itâ€¦ it is being okay," Franz gasped. "The tablet is living."

The statement was met with mixed levels of relief.

Tom cleared his throat. "Thank you, Fly. You're A-W-E-S-O-M-E, too. Thank you for letting me off easy. No, Penny and I are not siblings. I don't understand the phrase "ship". I probably don't want to. Please say hi to Mr Ploopinschnooker for me. Youtube 'pick a lock'. You'll get a bajillion hits (it's where I learned the art)."

Shelby scoffed.

"In the meantime, as regards to the 'perfect love song'â€¦"

Laura rolled onto her stomach on the armchair (quite a feat). "Why does everyone _alwaysâ€¦"_

Shelby patted her shoulder consolingly. "You'll grow up, dear, no worries."

Otto didn't hear. Pidge had locked a pair of headphones around his head, and the poor boy was lookingâ€¦ _dazed_.

"â€¦ 'Monster.' Lady Gaga."

Eyes riveted to his person. Dumbfounded eyes.

"â€|really?" Franz asked.

"â€|_really?"_ Laura said weakly.

Tom smiled cheerfully, looking for all the world like he'd just proclaimed a favorable fate of two great nations.

Pigeonattack scrolled through the list of messages. "Regular mailâ€| regular mailâ€| oh, how lovely! Thank you! â€| regular mailâ€| y'all are so awesomeâ€| Ah _hah_! Here, Wing, you do this one."

Wing calmly picked up his tablet and scrolled down to the appropriate message, seemingly unperturbed that this one had been selected _especially_ for him. "From Schnizel." He looked up. "The name rings a bellâ€|

First off, I'd like to say thank you to Wing for reading out my last message. FTW stands for 'FOR THE WIN' I think. :S Anyhow... Question for Tom: We don't find out much about you in the H.I.V.E. books so erm... *cough* If you could have any superpower, which would it be, why and what would you use it for? *Frown* *mutters: why didn't I think to ask this to Otto* "

Wing pronounced the asterisks "asterisk-cough-asterisk". Shelby shook her head in grief.

Wing ignored her. "Thank you for explaining another idiosyncrasy of contemporary slang," he said to the air.

Otto stretched out his legs and leaned back in his chair Big Cheese Style. "I already have a superpower, but if I could have another one, it would definitely be the ability to turn into anything at will."

"Would it be _truly_ turning into something, or more like an Animagus where you retain your mental functions, etcetera?" inquired Laura.

"Not your turn, not your turnâ€|" Their easygoing moderator turned to Tom, who was tapping his chin.

Tap, tap, tap.

"Ah hah! I know just what I would want!"

Wait, wait, wait.

"I would want the power to cut through anything with lasers from my eyes! _Purple_ lasers!"

Franz shuddered. "One Raven running around is plenty."

Penny grimaced. "The lasers-coming-from-eyes thing only looks cool in cartoons, you know. I think it'd look like your eyes are bleeding. I'll read next." Thus, she picked up her tablet. "Um, by the way, do we get to bring these back with us when we go back to HIVE?"

"Nero has rules against PDAs that aren't blackboxes," Nigel reminded them.

"Those rules can go splat," said Shelby, looking pleadingly over at Pidge. "Please, can we keep them?"

Pidge shrugged. "If Nero and Raven et al. allow you to. That's cool with me."

Foaly had told her they'd self-destruct after a given time period, anyways.

"From dizzylizzy13:

Dearest Tom,

If you could travel anywhere in the world with ONE person in the same room as you, who would it be, and where would you go?

Sincerely, dizzylizzy13"

"Japan. With Wing."

Wing looked slightly flattered. "Oh. Ah, why, may I ask?"

"Because Japan is awesome and you know your way around. Plus you speak the language. Plus you're awesome and seem like you'd be a really good travel companion."

"Thank you."

"Oh, and you'd have to bring me, too!" said Shelby quickly.

"Hm?" Tom looked up. "I think dizzylizzy13 said just '_ONE'_, didn't she?"

Pidge was too busy scrolling to mutter a wisecrack, totally intent on the wonderful mail. "Regularâ€|regularâ€| Ah, lovely!~"

She elegantly set down the tablet with an elegant _thunk_ and folded her hands. "From Aranel Azamai:

Tom,

If you had to date one person in that room who would it be, and why?

~Aranel

"And if you say 'Wing', I will giggle," said Otto.

He received a bunch of funny looks for his trouble.

"You _giggle_?" ask Laura incredulously.

"Oh, yes, he does," Penny whispered, nodding sagely. "I've seen it. It's really adorable."

Back to the question.

Tom frowned. "More inquiries into my private life?"

"Get over it, dude, you've gotten off pretty easy so far."

"Yours weren't so bad themselves, Otto."

Otto scoffed. "Harder than yours, they were."

Tom glanced over at Pidge, who was examining and gently swirling a vial of perfectly clear liquid and muttering "_tasteless, odorless, brilliantâ€¦" _

"Um, Pidge? Do I really have to answer this question?"

"Hm-_hm_", she said firmly. "Or _this_â€¦" she swirled the flask "â€¦will answer it for you."

"Alright, alright," Tom said quickly. "I'd date Penny, but only because I've known her longest, and I really don't think you should date someone until you really know them, and Penny's the only one I've known long enough to really know, besides Otto, of course, but I actually see her as more of aâ€¦ sister-figure."

"A nun?" Penny demanded.

"Yes, Sister Penny," Tom said sarcastically. "A nun."

"A nun!" Penny looked torn between affronted and pleased.

Pidge read the next one. "From Lord Sanguine:"

_Sorry for the wait. _

_ Dear Tom Ransom, _

_ What process did you use to 'liberate' equipment and other items from people. You claim that you never stole anything. _

"I never stole anything," Tom affirmed.

"Then...?" prompted Laura interestedly.

"We always helped ourselves to the excesses of corporate greed. That's not stealing. Did Robin Hood technically steal? No. Neither did we."

"What the heck you be doin' at HIVE?" Shelby demanded. "Your morals are almost as bad- which is to say ridiculously clean- as Wing's, where villainy is concerned."

"I wouldn't call them morals, exactly," Penny muttered.

Otto helped himself to the next request. "From Reensiel7:

_Dear Tom, _

First off, does Tom stand for anything? If not then I'd love to call you Tomithy. It has a nice *ring* to it.

Secondly...I haven't heard much about you...seriously. I mean I've heard TONS about the AMAZING Fab Four plus the hilarious duo Nigel

xâ€| "

Otto trailed off. "Ahâ€| "

Nigel looked rather sick. Franz, in the process of turning into a truffle by means of inhaling truffles, was not minding the conversation.

"Ahâ€| "

Shelby hiccupped, but that may just have been the Fanta.

"â€|do I read on?" Otto seemed relatively unperturbed, though most of the rest of the room had lapsed into a rather uncomfortable silence. "Or do I skipâ€|?"

Pigeonattack was poking at the silver platter sitting on the coffee table. It contained a lovely assortment of everything from sachertorte to macaroons (minus, oddly enough, coffee), but she was less interested in the sweets than the latticework. "By your leave, follow your heartâ€| "

In a strange, almost alarming bout of kindness, Otto proceeded gallantly.

"Laâ€|laâ€|wow, this is interestingâ€|

â€|_but I have not heard a lot about you..._

So Tomithy...I've got to ask...

What's your favourite colour?

And another thing: Are you hot?

...NOT temperature wise...looks wise. Oh and I only trust Shelby with this answer because you are probably very biased.

I'd say, I didn't put you through too much torture. Consider yourself a lucky one.

Regards,

~Reensie (^_^)

Tom exhaled in relief. "Name: Tom. Favorite color: Blue. Or Black. Or purple. I don't know, actually. I also likeâ€| "

"Pink!" exclaimed Penny.

"Pink's not bad, eitherâ€| as for whether or not I am of a fantastically knock-your-socks-off appearance in accordance with contemporary ideals?" Tom grinned. "I'm _hot_."

Shelby nodded. "I would have to agree."

"Yeah," said Otto. "When you and Wing travel the world, humanity will keel over and swoonâ€| "

Wing sighed. It was his way of preening.

"I'll read the last question," he offered. "From BreakerLake:

Yo, Sawyer,

There've already been plenty of cracks on your name, which I can imagine is pretty annoying, so I'll get straight to the point. If you were nursing a mini potted cactus by your bedside, what would you name it?

Thanks. I need help naming my baby saguaro.

-BL"

"Benjamin," Tom said immediately. "Wait, your initials are 'BL'?"

The nonpresent BreakerLake did not answer.

Otto closed his eyes. "Ahâ€¦ according to Google and Urban Dictionary, BL can stand for British Library, Bench-and-Leave (a common type of training used by lazy football players in a weight room when they only bench press and then leave), a clever abbreviation that no one will ever know the true meaning of, andâ€¦erâ€¦"

"Say hi to your baby saguaro for me," Laura said to the air.

"And with that," said pigeonattack grandly. We move on to our next victâ€¦" ah, what am I saying? We move on to our next Very Lucky Fanmail Receiver!"

"That'll be me, of course," Penny said, encouraged by the relative mildness of Tom's treatment.

"Actuallyâ€¦" pidge turned to Franz. "â€¦the fans seem to want _him_."

"Three boys in a row? Preposterous!" Penny yelled. "I mean, aren't they going to get _bored_ of all this testosterone? _I'm_ getting bored."

"No, you're not," said Tom. "You were participating pretty enthusiastically."

Pigeonattack mildly turned over to Penny. "Fine. I'll select a female. However, you still have to wait. No worries, your turn will yet comeâ€¦"

And then she pulled out of her back pocket a Ziploc baggie willed with popsicle sticks, each of which had a name inscribed upon in Sharpie. Pulling out all the males' names, she then held it at arm's length, turned her face away, and randomly pulled.

"And we have a winner!"

"Who's the lucky winner?" asked Nigel dryly.

The popsicle stick was a little hard to read, but the capital L was clearly visible.

"Oh, _bother_â€|" groaned the Very Lucky Fanmail Receiver, burying her face in her hands.

Shelby calmly patted her thigh. " 'S'okay, Brand. Hey, maybe you'll get lucky and only ten percent of your messages will be intrusions into your general personal life."

"And the rest?"

"The _rest_ will be regarding you _et l'amour._"

* * *

><p>To be continued...
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4. Chromium

Since when did pidge chapters clock in at over 6K words? Good grief, I'm enjoying this **_way**_** too much. Thankzamillion for the brilliantly hilarious fanmail. I nearly collapsed reading them, my tummy hurt so much from giggle-snorting. XDDD**

* * *

><p>Chapter IV

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Chromium

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"Just take a deep breath, dear, it'll all be perfectly fine. Wraith's guarantee."

"Would you like some water? You're going red. Oh, my, you're not getting a fever, are you? You're pinker than my hair!"

"â€|Ja, definitely a fever. Someone get a cold cloth! Pidge! Please get us a cold cloth. I am believing Laura to be going underâ€|"

"I'm fine, I'm fine!" Laura exclaimed impatiently, slamming her fist down on the arm of her chair.

"Space! She is needing space!"

Pidge held up the Hand of Silence as the miniature chaos threatened to escalate. "Laura _is_ needing space, but I'm actually in favor of letting Shelby and Penny scoot their chairs closer on either side of her so that, in the event that a particularly scandalous piece of fanmail shows up, she might beâ€| ahâ€| Well, 'restrained' isn't exactly the word I'm looking forâ€|"

"I'll be fine. I _am_ fine. Bugger off, everyone."

"Anyway! Would anyone like a to use the restroom or grab a drink from the fridge? I'm going to be locking them up before we commence so

that nobody has _any_ excuse to leave the room. I'm getting sick of people randomly getting up and leaving."

Franz ran to the fridge.

"Oy, Franz get me a Fanta!" Shelby called.

"Sure! Oh, and if anybody is needing to use the restroom, don't be worrying; it's very nice; it has one of those crystal-bowl-style sinks and the tiles look like real stone!"

"You should probably lock the balcony door, too," Nigel whispered to pidge, who nodded.

"Good idea. Don't need any desperate escape attempts. Plus, it's annoying when something awkward comes up and someone goes to the balcony to have a little cry/laugh/whatever."

Franz, as it happened, had brought Fantas for everyone. Wing politely got up to go exchange it for a slightly healthier glass of orange juice.

Laura was fidgeting in her chair a considerable amount. "Can we get started, already? Let's just get this over with."

Otto clasped his hands together, smiling kindly. "Lovely! In accordance with your strategy, I'll read first."

"Wait!" yelled Shelby, running back from the bathroom (having downed her Fanta a little too quickly).

"Yeah, wait!" yelled pidge, running back from the kitchen with an armful of sustenance, tucking a set of keys into her pocket.

As they sat down, Otto cleared his throat. "Laura's first piece of fanmail is from West of the Moonbeam!

Laura. Hi.

You are an inspiration and I'm going to respect your plea for no personal questions as I would feel the same! (Although I'll read with pleasure all the other questions and answers to do with you and certain other people...not saying any names.)

_Do you regret coming to HIVE? Would you have preferred to have missed near death experiences and injury and have just stayed happy and clueless about world villain affairs in Scotland? It's just I always felt a little sorry for you . :) _

Good luck! Moonbeam"

(He then muttered something inaudible about what sounded like a "pigeonmeister".)

Laura breathed an audible sigh of relief. "Oh, thank you. I'm glad to be an inspiration." She smiled. "Um, in answer to your question, if I'd stayed in Scotland, I would be blissfully free of near death experiences and injuries and stayed happy and clueless indeed, but I also wouldn't have seen such extraordinary things and met such extraordinary people. My abduction to HIVE saved me from a life of

boredom, and for that, I have no regrets. There's no need to feel sorry for me."

Shelby brushed away an imaginary tear. "D'awwwâ€¦!"

"Shut up, Shel."

"Actually," said Tom, "I couldn't agree more. I was bored out of my mind until HIVE came along."

There were general nods all around.

"Yeah," agreed Shelby. "the Wraith was getting bored of simply stealing diamonds. I mean, after you've broken into the Louvre, what else is there to do?"

"And who knows?" said Penny. "HIVE could be in Scotland, for all we know. I mean, Hogwarts is, isn't it?"

Shelby and pidge wordlessly rose to execute high fives with her.

Wing picked up his tablet, nodding in approval at what he saw. "From Fire:

Laura.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

Fire

P.S. Unlike Tom I expect you to give a decent answer, you should be able to define decent yourself.

Hmâ€¦ that should be a semicolon between the words 'answer' and 'you'," Wing noted.

"Be quiet, you proper person you," Shelby drawled.

"Ten years?" Laura paused. "Ideally, I'd have an interesting job as a technical consultant at GLOVE. "

Otto nodded. "That would be cool."

"You guys are so geeky I'm going to _scream_."

"Shut up, Shel."

"The next one," said Franz, scrolling through his tablet, "is from StarkidHufflepuff:

Yay! Now it's Laura's turn. Hmm, Ok, here's my question - What would you change if you could do one day over? OK, have fun!"_

Laura leaned back in her chair. "One day over. Wow, I don't know. Maybeâ€¦ maybe I'd tell Otto, Wing, and Shelby they're all idiots and ditch them before we all charged off to the 'submarine pen'. That was back in first year."

"Hey, you were one of the engineers behind that fiasco," Otto

protested. "None of us could have imagined it would beâ€œ"

"I'm saying that in _hindsight_, it was a terrible idea."

Wing lifted his glass. "Cheers to that."

"And the next one," said Tom, with barely concealed delight, "is from I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly! And she's sent _me_ a little message, too!"

'Oh, bugger," Laura whispered under her breath.

"_To: Tom R. _

Reply: I did YouTube it once, and my brother called my parents. I prefer the feds any day."

Tom looked solemn. "You poor baby."

"_To: L. Brand_

From: Fly

I DO NOT LIKE YOU, REDHEAD. Because EVERY SINGLE TIME I see you, my mind screams "Y U NO KISS THE STUPID OBTUSE OBLIVIOUS BOY ALREADY!"

Laura jumped to her feet. Tried, too, actually; Shelby and Penny were managing to keep a pretty firm grip on her despite their fitful giggling. Otto looked highly insulted.

"_So in this mail I'll basically torture you in hopes of achieving Ottra."_

"THE HECK?"

"_Q) In YOUR opinion, what LOVE SONG, with lots of L-O-V-E, describes your state of mind? In reference to Otto._

Because, while your answers were surprisingly philosophical, Tom (if I was in your place, MY answers would include phrases like blow it up/banana milkshake/alien abduction/I plead not guilty/Dumbledore would have never let this happen) MONSTER? I just heard it and... disturbing. For Ottra? Ew."

Tom scowled. "You have no taste."

"_And Laura-IT HAD BETTER BE A LOVE SONG WITH L-heart-V-E.

—

Also...assuming someone says-heck, wait a minute, let's make it more authentic-I say I ship Otto and Shelby. Comments?

(I mean, THIS should get a reaction, right?)"

The predicted reaction was predictably immediate.

Shelby released Laura, abandoning Penny, and yelled, "THAT IS HELLA WRONG."

Laura broke away and announced, "WHOEVER YOU ARE, FLY, WHEREVER YOU ARE, I SWEAR I AM GOING TO HUNT YOU DOWN AND YOU WILL NEVER"

"Mehhh!" whined Penny, throwing up her arms into the air. "I give up!"

Otto was, once again, screwing up his eyes and seemed to be reaching out with his mind, reaching out with murderous intent to all surrounding electronics

Pidge snatched up the tablets and dumped them into a previously-unnoticed, mysterious-looking box. "Huh-uh-uh."

"SO, VERY WRONG. I HAVE NO IDEA"

"AND I WILL [censored] AND I WILL [censored] AND"

"This is great," said Franz, popping a handful of caramel kettlecorn into his mouth. Nigel whimpered.

"Cheerio!~" Tom said brightly.

Wing silently finished his orange juice and set it on the coffee table, looking at it sadly.

"Are you going to answer the question, or what?" Penny demanded. "Look, entertaining as this is, you've got questions to answer, and"

"I am under no obligation to answer any questions," Shelby said firmly, calming down enough to fall into her chair with a heavy thump and crossing her arms like she was going to stay that way for the next few millennia.

"Come on," said Nigel tiredly. "Just name a song. Any song."

"That is below my dignity," Laura said petulantly, sitting down, but looking about as tense as a wound up spring, ready to leap out at the slightest provocation. "That would only add fuel to that silly rumor 'Ottra', did she call it?"

"My dear," said pigeonattack. "You have little choice in the matter."

"Hm-hm!" said Franz brightly. "Hey, is Otto busy being asleep?"

pidge frowned. "Looks like it. The poor dear has had a very long, very busy day. Shame."

"He could just be pretending," Wing reasoned.

Pidge brightened considerably. "Of course! So, ah, Laura, if you are ready"

Laura sighed frustratedly. "I don't listen to much pop. None of it would fit, anyway."

Pidge sneezed.

"I know a bit of classical, though, so I'll sayâ€¦" She paused, wearily glancing at Otto, who was snoring softly and could have passed for a rather cute polar bear plushy had he been dressed in white (as it was, he looked like a dude with funky hair). "â€¦'The Blue Danube'," she whispered.

Having recovered remarkably quickly, even though she still looked like she wanted to throw the Mysterious Box of Impenetrability out the window, Shelby appeared about to cry. "Soâ€¦ sweetâ€¦"

Wing nodded, smiling softly. "A good choice."

There was a pensive silence.

"Hey, hey," said Tom, effectively ruining the tranquil atmosphere, "I know that was composed by Strauss in, like, the late nineteenth century-ish, but isn't that alsoâ€¦"

"The tune from Disney's _The Three Musketeers_!" Penny squealed. "I think the song was called 'On Wings of Loâ€¦'"

"Oh, my," said pidge. "I think the wordless edition fits these circumstances much better."

Laura looked like she wanted to melt through the floor, which, as previously stated, would have bothered the downstairs neighbors and as such it was a rather good thing she refrained from doing so.

"You know, though," said Franz, "I think Fly was aiming for a different genre, and something with words that actually fit."

"Oh, shut up," said Shelby. "The tune and feeling of 'The Blue Danube' is perfect."

Having stealthily reached into the MLB and procured his tablet (at which pidge realized it would be rather prudent to bring them out so that they might keep moving), Tom cleared his throat. "There's a second question. From Fly."

"Bugger, bugger, bollocks."

"Hey, no swearing under my roof."

"_Q2) Remember Mandy McTavish, that girl who was ** about you? In book one? The one you spied on? Using top secret government technology? Yeah, her. I know you might not remember exactly, being abducted and taken to a facility for villainous education in a volcano and being attacked by mutated plant monsters and android robot assassins and whatnot, but what had Mandy been saying about you?"_

"I'm not going to bother asking about 'book one' and how you know all this." Laura sniffed. "That question's easy. She was insulting my intelligence via snide remarks about nerdiness and geekdom and how I'd never get a boyfriendâ€¦" not that I care whatsoeverâ€¦", as usual. Oh, the scourge known as envyâ€¦"

Shelby nodded in understanding. "Anyway, there will always be conveniently located nerdy boys, right? Next is from :

_Dear Laura, _

I have a question for you, as you know probably. And you have to answer it. Hmmm. What should I ask? Okay. What is the best site you ever hacked, other than the NASA? One more. What do you make of these random references (One of which I am responsible for) to Aftershock, book 1, and etc? Just curious.

Sincerely, Invader Tor"

"Erâ€¦" said Laura, looking rather grateful for the relative simplicity of the questions. "I've only really cracked NASA's database once or twice, both times to gain some pretty cool codes. I've gone into the Prime Minister's personal computer." She blushed. "I sort of wish I hadn't."

"Is this David Cameron we're talking about here?" asked Pidge.

"Aye."

Pidge nodded in approval. "Impressive. I heartily approve."

"Um, great. Andâ€¦ as for the random references? I've given up deciphering them."

"They refer to assorted databases and archives," Pidge explained breezily. "From Sage:

Hi y'all!

Poor Laura. I know how you feel, so I will refrain from asking about your love life. Let's see..."

"Thank you," Laura said sincerely.

"_1) I have an Asian friend named Laura, so: Have you ever thought about being something rather than Scottish? (American, Asian, Vulcan...) And if so, what would you be?_

2) Would you rather read a romance novel about you and Otto or write a code for an evil overlord that could destroy the world?

(Okay, I lied a bit. Sorry.)"

Laura pursed her lips as Shelby cackled delightedly. "I've never thought about that, no. And I'd rather right the code. And then destroy it. Thank you, Sage."

Otto was still sound asleep, which was rather good, although he looked like he was having a pretty bad dream.

"Who would ever write stories about you and Otto?" Tom mused aloud. "Wouldn't they have something better to do with their time?"

Pidge sneezed.

"Do you need a Kleenex?" asked Shelby in concern. "You've been sneezing a lot."

"Nah, just allergies. Thanks. Sage has one more question. She asks if you have a motto. And then she apologizes in case her question embarrassed you."

Laura smiled. "Apology accepted. Thank you; of all these people, you are the first to show courtesy. No, I don't really have a motto."

"Eat, drink, and be merry!"

"No one asked you, Tom."

"It's a good one though, so I just thought I'd throw it out there. No need to get your pink panties in a twist, Penny."

"For your information, my panties are blue. I happen to know that _yours_ are pink."

"I don't wear panties. Nor do I wear briefs. I prefer a little breeze around my vital regions, thanksâ€"

"Dude, TMI."

"I could not leave it uncorrected. You're quite right, though; they _are_ pink."

"NEXT," said Penny loudly, "we have mail from invader13panda, who asks:

Why Otto?, because I want to know the reason you like the dense albino. My other question is how do you stand Shelby talking about Wing all the time?"_

"Otto is a good friend." Laura sniffed. "He has always been there for me, and I for him, but outside of that, we bear no romantic attraction."

Whatever bug causing the sneezies was definitely going around, because Shelby and pidge were both doubled over, hacking their daylight out.

"As for Shelby talking about Wing?"

Shelby sobered immediately. Wing looked vaguely interested.

"She doesn't. Not as much as one would expect, contrary to popular belief. In fact, she talks about him no more than she does One Direction."

"Oh, no, not another Directioner," Tom moaned.

"Hey!" yelled Shelby, leaping to her feet. "You're just jealous! All you male haters are! They're cute, and they have good voices, and they seem to have a pretty decent integrity, and they're cuteâ€"

Penny hesitated, then nodded adamantly. "Um-hm!"

"Is this something I should know about?" Wing asked.

"Yes! I mean, no! _No_, because then you'll be a hater too!"

"Harry has pretty eyes," Penny murmured dreamily.

Tom rounded on Pidge. "What do you make of the?"

Pidge blushed. "They're very good-looking indeed. And they're British. And they sing quite well, and their songs are catchy, even though their lyrics are pink and purple."

Tom groaned.

"However, like with Justin Bieber, I don't worship them. Worshipping's weird and a waste of time and very schoolgirly. Obsession is a waste of time. But haters stink. They're mean. There's no reason to hate; whatever did they do to you? And they're good. They really are."

"Thank you for the sermon, Pidge."

"You're welcome. I got it from Niga Higa on Youtube."

Franz took his tablet. "Schnizel is having a quick word for Wing: _I admire how you've kept your cool so far... Although that may change when you start to receive fanmail yourself. Hehehehe! :P."_

Wing looked torn between flattered and anxious.

"_She is also having a question for Laura:_

To Laura: I don't know what to ask you... Maybe... *ahahahhahah!* how many kids would you like to have with Otto?"

"Zero," said Laura. She sounded like a tired robot.

Pidge seemed to be glancing towards a vial in her pocket, debating whether or not to use it.

"I'm not sure I'd want kids with anyone, actually. I'm still a teen; I've time to decide!"

Satisfied with the answer, Pidge pushed the vial back in her pocket.

"Shame that Otto's asleep. We could use some input," said Shelby.

"Whoever said I was asleep?" Otto lifted his head, groggily rubbing his eyes.

"Yay, Otto is being awake!"

"Mornin', friends. You say you need my input on somethin'?"

"It's nothing," Laura said quickly.

"Yeah, we were just wondering how many kids you'd like to have with Laura," said Shelby.

Otto stared at her. "That has got to be the most ridiculous question I've every heard."

"No, it's not!"

"I'm going back to sleep."

"No, you're not! Here, have some coffee."

"I don't drink coffee."

"Nonsense! Everyone drinks coffee."

"'Night, all."

"Ottooooo!"

Snore.

Shelby scowled. "Don't you want to hear what Scarlet Silverweaver recommends as your personal love theme?"

_On a non-question note, I know the perfect song for Otto and Laura: Future Soon by Jonathan Coulton. _

If you haven't heard it, look it up. It's just too perfect for those two."

"Yeah, that's a good one," Penny agreed.

Laura and Otto were identically kneading their palms into their eyes.

"What is _with_ all this musical advice?" Laura put her forehead in her hands, glancing at Otto, who was determinedly looking everywhere but her.

Shelby, Tom, Penny, Pidge, and Franz were watching them carefully. Nigel and Wing seemed indifferent.

Shelby continued carefully. "The same asker also has a word for Laura, personally.

Dear Laura,

Let me start off by saying that you are wicked awesome. And I don't know why George Lucas changed Star Wars so that Han shot in self-defence. I think Lucas's brain is going... And yes, I know your computer background a HIVE says "Han shot first."

Now, on to the question:

What is the most important thing (on a government scale) that you've ever hacked?

_Sincerely, _

Scarlet"

Laura tiredly held up a cryptic hand sign. "May the force be with

you, Scarlet. You, too, are wicked awesome. Practically everyone knows about my desktop image, so it's pointless to protest, I guess."

"I knew it!" Otto exclaimed.

"I've cracked into the American CIA. It was a total accident; I really wanted that supercodeâ€¦ Oh, and by the way, there _is_ a difference between "hacking" and "cracking". Hacking is generic; it applies to anyone who builds or writes software. Cracking is malicious; it's when you break into people's stuff." She grinned. "I do both."

"Me, too!"

"Yes, Otto, we know."

"And now," said Tom, "From Wasp:

Laura,

If you had to turn the eight people you're with now (Otto, Wing, Shelby, Franz, Nigel, Tom, Penny, and Pigeon) into four couples, what would they be?"

"Now, that's just mean," said pidge, crossing her arms (by the way, Shelby had long since uncrossed hers. Millennia, my tush). "I do all this work and _this_ is how you treat me?"

Laura threw her arms into the air, the first real smile breaking out across her face. "Hallelujah! Alright, let's seeâ€¦"

The aforementioned eight people fidgeted nervously.

"Um, we have a problem," said Nigel. "Aside from you, there are five guys and three girls."

"Never a problem, am I right, beloved fellow crack shippers?"

Pidge gasped, then winced. "I never knew you wereâ€¦ Oh, Merlin, what have Iâ€¦ _Scheisse!"_

"Watch your language."

"It's German, as well you should know, Franz, so technically, it's perfectly appropriate for English-speaking audiences." For quite possibly the first time in observed and recorded history, pidge found herself very much in distress. "This is sooo wrong! This is sooo bad! Thisâ€¦ this ain't _right!"_

Laura hummed something to herself that sounded very suspiciously like a hybrid of "The Blue Danube" and "Monster". "Payback time!~"

"I never did anything to you!" Penny wailed.

Nigel looked stricken. Wing appeared to be in a state of great discomfort.

Laura grinned. "Shel. You and Wing."

Neither seemed very surprised. If anything, they looked oddly relieved.

"Penny. You andâ€¦ ahâ€¦"

"She's like a sister to me. Don't you dareâ€¦"

"I know, Tom. You're withâ€¦" Aw, damn, I already used Wing. Nah, let's mess things up a bit in an attempt to please the fans, shall we? Otto and Shelby! Wing and Tom! Penny and Franz! Nigel andâ€¦ ah, looks like you, pidge!"

Looking all too satisfied, she crossed her arms. Her resemblance to the cat-that-caught-the-canary was stark and uncanny and scary.

Pidge held out a hand to Nigel. "Not my first choice, but you'll have to do. Pleased to meet you. I'm pidge."

"I know," Nigel said meekly.

"Not my first choice," Tom said to Wing, "but you'll have to do. Hi, I'm Tom."

Wing raised his eyebrows.

Franz was looking very much relieved not to have been slashed. Penny scratched her head awkwardly. "Ahâ€¦. How's the kettle corn?"

"Otto, I hate to say this, but you were my last choice."

"Even next to Penny and pidge?"

"Yeah. At least they'd be good company."

"You, Shelby, are seriously messed up. No wonder you, too, were my last choice."

"Hah! Who's messed up, now?"

"Order in the court!" Laura yelled. "Next question!"

"Eager, aren't we?" muttered pidge. Nevertheless, she gestured for everyone to return to their seats.

They did so.

Cautiously.

"Oh, Laura, you missed one of the most popular slashes on the fandom."

"Hm?~"

"Please cut the tildes. Yeah, you missed Wing xâ€¦"

"There were so many choices!" Laura complained. "Especially for Wing. I could only pick one, and I picked the one with the least far-reaching ramifications!"

"â€|Yeah, you're a closet shipper, all right."

"Oh, and what do you mean by 'fandom'?"

"From dizzylizzy13," said Wing, clearing his throat surprisingly calmly for a man of his recent experiences but unsurprisingly calmly for a man of Fanchu lineage.

"_Oh, my dear Miss Brand, what do we have in store for you today?_"

It won't be too clichÃ© a question, I promise.

Would you die to save Otto Malpense?"_

Laura paused. "Yeah," she said quietly. "But I'd do that for any of my friends. Thank you for the question; that was a good one."

"Aranel Azamai asks about your favorite movie," said Penny. "What's the verdict?"

"The Star Wars series, _duh_."

"Shut up, Shel."

"You've been saying that line a lot, lately. Get some originality, girl."

"But, aye, Star Wars. Intelligent and well-done. Beautiful plot, brilliantly conceptualized technology."

"And from Firebird," said pidge.

"_I'm so sorry that you've got to answer all these reviews! You seem like such a nice girl. What do you plan on doing with your HIVE skills when you grow up? If I ever meet a villain, I hope it's you. (or any of your friends) You are the smartest and most reasonable of the villains in books, movies, and real life._

Keep going like this, and I know you'll go far.

Your fan,"_

Firebird"_

BTW, I love the accent!"_

"Thanks," said Laura appreciatively. "I know, this is pretty hellish."

Pidge smiled angelically.

"And thank you; I often find myself of the same opinion regarding my geniusâ€" "

"Only with tech-y, geeky stuff," added Shelby.

"â€"and as I've mentioned, I plan to work as a technical consultant at GLOVE, inventing cool toys for villains to play with."

She seemed considerably more relaxed, now. Thank goodness. What a shame her peace was about to once again be blasted to smithereens.

"The next one," said Penny, "is from PleaseEnterNameHere:"

Hullo! It's weird, people weren't this mean to Otto. (Maybe because you'll give a better reaction?) I dunno. What I also don't know, but do want to know, is this- How long have you been completely, head-over-heels in love with Otto? For some reason, I don't imagine it was the love at first sight stupid romance novel thing. Bye-bye."

Laura's face was deathly expressionless. "For the umpteenth time, I am not 'head-over-heels in love' with _anyone_, much less _Otto_â€"

"Yeah, yeah."

"â€"SHUT UP, SHELBY! And when I _do_ fall in love, if _ever_, _I_ can assure you it will _not_ be _love at first sight_ like, as you rightly put it, a 'stupid romance novel thing'. Now, bye-bye."

"How rude," said Pidge. "She actually sympathized with you. She acknowledged people weren't this mean to Otto."

"The fact still stands that I am _NOT_ head-over-heels in loveâ€"

"You know," said Otto mildly. "I wouldn't blame you if you if you were, actually. Myâ€"

"Yes, yes, your swoon-inducingly dashing looks, your cute, untamed hair, your tiger attitudeâ€|" Tom boredly ran a hand through his hair. "Spare us, my dear."

"And from Reensiel7," Penny jumped in loudly, before her dear old friends could start a food fight.

"_Hey Laura_

Get ready. The question that I'm about to present is THE HARDEST question you will ever answer in your life. (the second hardest will be when Otto proposes because...well Otto will NEVER have the guts to actually ask that question)."

Otto scratched his head in confusion, as Laura buried her face in her hands. "I propose all the time."

"Not the

_I've-got-a-new-more-maniacal-than-ever-idea-whoopee-let's-try-it_type," Shelby said kindly. "The marriage type. But that shouldn't be very hard for Laura-dear to answer, and I'm sure Otto and his guts will come to terms with the idea eventually."

Laura looked ready to wail like a banshee.

"_Anyways... If you could chew one type of gum for the rest of your life, which brand (hehe puny) and flavour would you chose?_"

_After a considerable time to think...I've decided to go with Extra's
Dessert Delights: Key Lime Pie. WHY? Because key lime pie rocks my
socks, that's why._

By the way, I love your hair. Red hair is awesome.

From your fellow computer junkie,

Reensiel7 ()_

P.S. Tom: I love Pink too."

Tom pumped his fist into the air. "Woot! Pink! Wait, the color or the
singer. I like both. Did you know she was in Happy Feet 2? The
singer, I mean."

He was ignored by all but a very nodding-ish pidge, who
nodded.

"Thank you," said Laura, touching her lovely locks. "I'm really
flattered; seriously, I'm really grateful for all these unwarranted
compliments; they've just been spilling out by the
bucketfulâ€"

"Not as much as me, though."

"Otto, I most _definitely_ had more than you."

"No, you didn't. And you won't."

"Otto, that's preposterous."

"Ego, much?"

"Reason. Not ego."

"Bollocks."

"THERE IS TO BE NO SWEARING UNDER MY ROOF."

"I said 'haddocks'."

"You're a fish, you are."

"Slick and shiny, that's me!"

"I wouldnae take that as a complimentâ€|"

"My hair is white."

"My hair is _red._ Like Reensie said, red hair is awesome."

"Yeah, all the best book characters have red hair. Except most of
them end up dyingâ€| Lily Evans, Naruto's motherâ€|"

"No one asked you, Shel."

"â€| but then again, there's Starfire, Rachel Elizabeth Dare, Amy
Cahillâ€|"

"This is being better than a stand up!"

Penny coughed. "As amusing as this is, I believe we have a question to be answeredâ€|"

Laura blinked. "Oh, right." She glanced back down at the tablet. "I don't chew gum. Professor Pike made me stop, because he says it could get on the delicate components, as if it's going to walk right out of the rubbish bin and sit itself on the workbench."

"But which would you pick?"

"Iâ€| I don't knowâ€|" Laura frowned. "Mentos?"

"Not a gum. Pick Double Bubble Strawberryâ€| Strawberryâ€|whatever that one was called. It's good."

"â€|okayâ€|? Perhaps I'll just go withâ€| Extra's Dessert Delights: Key Lime Pie. It sounds good."

"And what a pleasant note to end this session on!" pidge remarked happily.

For theâ€| third? Fourth? Tenth? (they'd all lost count)â€| time that day, Shelby leaped spectacularly to her feet, arms crossed viciously, just as Laura sighed in relief and visibly collapsed back into the oh-so-squishily comfortable armchair. "NO! We'veâ€| there'sâ€| they've... there's been no forward movement! None! You can't end a session without forward movement, especially since this is technically the second and final part of the ****Ottra Installment**** (I would put that in small caps if I could, but I can't, most unfortunately) and you're totally letting down every fangirl's hopes and dreams by ending on this boring, romantically-lacking note, andâ€| _and_â€|" She stomped her foot in abject frustration.

"_And_," Franz continued for her, leaping to his feet as well with an equally visually stimulating _leap_, conveniently ignoring Nigel's whispered _Sit down, Franz._ "_And_, all this tension-inducing fanmail should be inducing â€| ah, _tension_, and you are just going to be letting it fizzle? I am not allowing that! Nein, we mustâ€|"

"No, no, I am not in the _least_ insulted by you all cutting me off when my time is over; the limelight's been _lovely_ but I am all too tired and I would _love_ a nap right now, in factâ€|"

"Too many italics," said Wing.

"â€|keep going until we reach a _resolution_," Franz finished. And then he sat back down to await the verdict.

Shelby remained standing.

Laura scowled. "Like I said, I'm _done._"

Crickets chirped.

Tom glanced warily at the tablets. "Are they chirping?"

"Yes," said Pidge.

Wing coughed quietly.

"So," demanded Laura. "Am I done, or not?"

Pidge seemed to think about it. She probably wasn't (thinking, that is). "Ah— Here's what I say. It's only the third session. We've got five to go. Plenty of time to resolve the Unresolved Se— ah, what I mean to say is— _issues_."

"What issues?"

Pidge waved her hand in disregard. The gesture was beginning to get rather annoying and overused, actually, but she wanted to get one more usage out of it. "Little issues. The-ship-must-sail-and-make-port, and all that. But if we were to resolve them now, what would we have to look forward to? Hmmm? Well, there's always Wingelby, but—"

"Wing'll be what?" asked Nigel in confusion.

Most everybody seemed rather befuddled, actually. The only ones who appeared to have any clue whatsoever and were actively following the ramble were Shelby and Franz (and Tom, possibly).

"Wing-el-by. Not 'Wing-will-be'."

"Huh?" Shelby was now scratching her head. This was not a good sign.

"Cheers to blissful ignorance, my friend. As I was saying, there's no need to worry about any ships not making port. We've got time. We've got interludes. And if anyone's feeling impatient, there's always other stuff to read."

"Huh." Otto nodded, most likely attempting to look like he was in the know, which he obviously wasn't because if he was, he'd most definitely be yelling or attempting to harass the poor tablets again. "So— who's next?"

Laura sighed in relief. Again. Knock on wood.

Pidge slowly turned to Franz, who immediately brightened. "Ready?"

5. Interlude: Snack Break at Studio 254

****Yeah. A chapter under 1.2k. Right when I was on my 6k+ roll, too—****

****I'm sorry. I've been working like mad for a certain musical endeavor (can't say what out of concern for privacy— namedropping said endeavor would make it really easy for any random internet cruiser to pinpoint me, but if you're curious and mention it in a review or something, I'd be happy to respond in a pm).****

****And then I wasted a ton of time uploading covers for "Pigeon's**

Prom", "Pento Bento", and "Les Amants". (Check them out if you have the time, though I'm not sure they're visible yet.)**

Thus. Since I didn't want to make you wonderful people wait an obscenely long amount of time (like I used to do back with "Prom", ahahaâ€|), I prepped this small chapter and I hope that, despite its ridiculously miniscule size (seriously, I can never accomplish satisfactory matter in under a thousand words), you manage to get a little fun out of it.

**After this Friday, whatever the outcome of the endeavor, I'll have a looot more timeâ€ at least one golden hour a day. This is good, because I've got coalescing in my mind the beginnings of a bunny for my first serious fic ever. As in planned, woven plot. Sculpted characterizations. Good, meaningful words (still stylistically thrown around au pigeon, but actually carefully thought out). All that jazz. So, I shall enjoy this rare, wonderful thing known as free time!
^^**

[Until summer classes start. Damn whatever possessed me to try to get Trig outta the way.]

Ciao!

pidge

* * *

><p>Interlude:

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Snack Break at Studio 254

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"Before we begin," Franz said seriously, "we must be having a snack break." And he shoved the last handful of chips/crisps/unhealthy-morsels-of-popular-junk-food into his mouth, crunching up the empty bag with his other hand and sending it sailing into the rubbish bin across the room.

"You _are_ _on_ snack break," pidge remarked.

"Nein, nein." Franz brushed the crumbs off of his hands and onto the coffee table. "I am meaning a _real_ snack break, an official one, if you will. I say we should all take a few large bags of chips and not be commencing my session until they have all been consumed."

"Sorry, pal, I'm watching my weight." Shelby eyed her tummy critically.

"You have no weight to watch," Wing muttered.

Shelby beamed. "Don't flatter me. There're still a few ounces to be dropped in preparation for summertimeâ€|"

"Yeah, on a sunny, remote island," said Otto. "Although, of course, we'll unfortunately be under a volcano."

"and so maybe I should start getting on that regimen of"

"Diet cake?"

"Hey, Wing, just how did you know I was going to say that? I tell you, we be soul sisters or something."

"I'm a boy."

"Course, darling."

"Ooh, that reminds me of that song! 'Hey, soul sister, ain't that Mister mister on the radio, stereo, the way you move ain't fair you know' "

Nigel winced. "Oh, that song. Ugh"

"Hey, it's fun! Don't diss!~"

"So, about that snack break"

"Oh, Franz, I already told you"

"I won't shut up until we've had our snack break. Come on, it will only be taking a few minutes."

"Dude!" pidge gritted her teeth. "We don't have any more snacks! You've plowed through every last freaking fragment of edible stocks!"

And thus the crickets began beat boxing.

"Er" Tom raised his hand hesitantly. "I could go run and by some. There's a Duane Reade down the block"

"You're not leaving this building," pidge growled.

Tom shrugged. "Fine, then. Just tryin' to be helpful."

"Unless we were to put you on a tether ah, yes, I do have some of that Spider Silk 3000 biomimicry material left over from my last run-in with a giant hippo Yes, that would do"

"Er, forget I said anything. Please."

"Come on, my stomach is being growling. You are being abusive."

"You've just depleted my month's junk food allotment."

"I am a growing boy!"

"Blast that!"

"You know" Franz's eyes narrowed. "I am putting up with this, but the moment I am discontent, my father will hear about this."

pigeonattack pursed her lips, weighing her options. "Ich hasse dich"

sometimes, you know that? Curse my dependency on your father's wealth!"

"Snack time!"

"The fact still stands!"

"Listen." Laura had been awfully quiet ever since her session ended (blamelessly). It was the first time she'd spoken up, and everyone went silent.

"Yeah, Laura?" Otto leaned forward.

"Somebody, anybody get the damn junk food. This prattling was originally interesting, but it's starting to shred my barely-withstanding nerves, and I'm starting to get really, really, REALLY sick of this. Junk food. I don't care how." She pointed a finger at Franz. "Please shut him up. (No offense intended, Franz.) I'd been hoping we'd have a break after my session, anyway. So PLEASE. Someone. Get. The. Damn. JUNK FOOD."

"My sentiments exactly!" Otto exclaimed.

Laura rubbed the back of her head, obviously feeling the beginnings of a migraine coming on. "Please lower your voice, Otto."

"Sorry."

"S'fine."

In the ensuing awkward silence, Franz rubbed his stomach pitifully, looking up at pidge through long, blond lashes-o'-misery.

"Hey, pidge? I think we should try the tether idea."

Tom shot a glare in Penny's direction. "Oh, thanks. Yes, just sacrifice me, sacrifice me just like that, the companion who's stuck by your side all your life and who"

"It's just a run to the Duane Reade," Penny reasoned. "You were ready and willing just a few minutes ago."

"I don't"

Laura screamed, then threw her head into her lap and clutched it, muttering something indistinguishable about Loch Ness monsters and a very worrying '_my pet'._

pidge calmly stood and strode to the closet, the open blue button-up over her white t-shirt billowing dramatically. Upon her return, she produced a coil rope, fine and light and seeming to be woven of

"Is that spider silk?" Otto asked in fascination.

Laura looked up as well, migraine conveniently forgotten as she babbled, "Oh, wow, this is incredible, I've never seen it used this way before! I mean, it makes sense, and I know the military's been experimenting with it, it's one thousand times as strong as steel and

five times as impact resistant as Kevlarâ€¦ or was it five as steel, a thousand as Kevlar?"

Otto jumped in. "Oh, but it couldn't be actual spider silk; it'd be sticking to her hands. No, I think it's just a very clever piece of biomimicryâ€¦ Did you design this, pidge?"

pidge beamed. "Nope! I spent Franz's dad's money. And for fifteen glorious minutes, Tom, it's all yours!"

.

Despite the wait, the snack was delicious, and it was great fun running to the (recently unlocked) balcony to watch Tom run around on his leash, trying not to get entangled in a light pole or something.

For some reason, Franz seemed most eager to drag it out as long as possible, as much as he swore up and down he was in no way whatsoever the slightest bit nervous.

...

Whatever.

...

Time would tell.

6. Tie Dye

****I have an excuse for the lameness of this chapter, and this it be:****

****A fortnight ago, my computer ate all 8k words of it. Cue pigeonattack falling wailingly into the deep, dreary Abyss of Bummed-ness. I finally got around to rewriting the whole thing, which was an unspeakably heinous task, not because I don't love writing Franz (I really do love writing Franz, actually), but because with every word I painfully put to type, my heart ached for the beautiful draft lost forever in the vast darkness of cyberspace.****

****Without further procrastinationâ€¦ _-sigh-â€¦_ I present the Franz Installment. Thank all that is holy for the fact that the mail was just soâ€¦ _writable._****

* * *

><p>Chapter VI
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Tie Dye**
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Ah...

How wonderfully satisfactory it felt to be full, sated, filled to the brim with chips/crips/things-that-make-you-fabulously-obese. It felt the way they imagined one might feel post happy-juice (none of them being old enough to actually legally try that). It feltâ€¦ sublime.

And most of them were half passed out.

Shelby eyed the rest of the occupants of the room warily. "That can't be healthy."

"Shut up and let us nap," Penny moaned, flopping back into her chair with a muffled _thunk._

"I am _so_ going to regret this tomorrow," pidge muttered weakly. "I have never felt fatter in my freaking _life._"

"It is good to be having an ample stomach," Franz assured her. "For example, if you happen to be shipwrecked at sea, your fat's inborn buoyancy should keep you afloat for quite some time."

"I'm a dancer!" wailed pidge. "And former gymnast! I _cannot_ consume so many chips."

Laura peered at pidge with narrowed eyes. "You better not be one of those ditzy little anorexics. I believe McTavish was one of those."

pigeonattack waved a hand dismissively. "I assure you, I am not. I love food waaay too much."

Otto and Franz clapped lazily. "Here, here!"

"Are we ready to start, then?" Penny brightly reached for her tablet. Aside from Shelby, she was the only non-drowsy person in the room, though she'd consumed an entire bag of Ruffles herself.

Franz nodded slowly. "Let us commence!"

Nigel rubbed his eyes. "'Scuse me. I'm going to take a nap."

"Goodâ€¦ ideaâ€¦" Laura yawned.

pidge looked on balefully, though she herself was nearly out. "Dang. Y'all are such babies. Napping in the middle of the day outside of Southern Europe?"

"Let'sâ€¦ let's pretend we're in Southern Europe," Wing suggested, looking surprisingly groggy himself (though, then again, he _had_ consumed quite a large bag of Fritos, to everyone's surprise).

"What's with you guys?" Shelby asked loudly. "Food's not supposed to make you sleepy in non-Thanksgiving-ish amounts."

Penny shrugged. "Must be something in the food."

And then she grinned.

"And something in that Sprite you're sipping, Shelby."

Shelby looked down at her soda like she'd just noticed it was there. She gave it a sniff, and then her eyes widened. "Oh, no, you did not!"

"Yeah, I did." Penny grinned widely. "I'm bored. Sick of this place. Damn Studio 254. So I'm leaving. Sleep tight, _cherie_."

Within seconds, they were all conked out like rocks, Shelby having collapsed into her chair, mouth falling open and gross little snores emitting across the room. Penny stood, brushed off her hands, and rose to her feet. "At the risk of sounding cliché, my work here is done."

Her eyes breezed over the ceiling, riveting on one particular spot in the corner. "_Alors_."

Feeling very cool and stealthy like the cool and stealthy girl she was, she climbed onto the back of Nigel's conveniently located armchair (sorry, friend) and pulled out a roll of indispensable usefulness, freshly acquired from the neighborhood Duane Reade, proceeding to pull out a section and smack it onto the ceiling in such a way that it stuck at the three inches on the end, looped down a foot, and then stuck back to the ceiling. She deftly ripped away the roll, and kissed it. "Oh, duct tape, you wonderful thing you."

And then she grabbed the loop hanging from the ceiling (an ingeniously constructed handle, hah-hah!) and yanked. Hard.

A crack in the ceiling appeared, and Penny was about to congratulate herself and prepare to slip through when a large chunk of ceiling actually came free, bringing with it something big and metal and machine-like that tumbled down, just as the alarms went off and began wailing like banshees, and she just stood there staring in horror as the helicopter came closer and closer and now it was just an inch away!

"YOU IDIOT!"

She was paralyzed, rooted to the spot like a hapless oak.

"I—" The earth was snatched away from under him as someone grabbed his lower body and thrust him across the room, and then Wing was back on his feet and breathing hard.

"YOU IDIOT! WHAT, IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT IS GOOD AND PURE, THE HELL DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING?"

The entire room was awake (fudge, even the furniture must've awoken) and staring at her. pidge was possibly scariest, half in shock and half in utter fury. Next up must've been Tom. Franz and Otto were in poses rather reminiscent of those found at Pompeii and Herculaneum, arms in strange positions of defense and staring in shock at the chunk of machinery now protruding a good five feet into the studio.

"Penny," said Tom quietly. He was deathly pale. "Penny, you realize

you could have died just now. You came _this close_ to death."

"You have been officially inducted into the I-Have-Stared-Death-In-The-Face club," said Franz, unfreezing and walking over to shake Penny's hand. "Congratulations. Tom, you are now the only one not being in the club. I am not knowing of pidge's status."

"I'm not in the club," said pidge dryly.

"That's beside the point," said Tom. "So far from the point, actually, it's not even adjacent. Pennyâ€" "

"I know, I know, I'm sorry!" Penny wailed. "I'm really, really sorry, I could have gotten killedâ€" "

"_Imagine_ the _mountainous_ mountain of paperwork I'd have!" pidge said furiously. "And Nero would have my head, and Raven would have my heart, and she'd offer it up like the Aztecs did and then Tom would _eat_ itâ€"|" She put her head in her hands, then stared up at Penny with a stony face. "You need to be punished."

"I'll pay for it! I'll pay for the damage, andâ€" "

Franz ran a quick tally on the tablet's built-in calculator. "And money for stress, which will doubtless be taking years off all our lives, andâ€"|" Oh, good, Otto unfroze; I was worried I would be having to figure in the hospital bill for shock treatmentâ€"|" "

"OH GOD JUST SHUT UP." Shelby strode forward, herded everyone back to their respective chairs, and yelled, "_I_ will handle this. _Cheers._"

She paused in front of Penny, who stared back meekly. "Penny."

"Um-hm?"

"Do you solemnly promise you will not attempt such a thing again?"

"Yes." Penny nodded vigorously.

"Are you sorry for what you have done?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall deign to grace you with forgiveness and sweet mercy, etc. etc., and you may rest knowing you are still my friend and ally."

Teary eyed, they fell into each other's arms, weeping.

And pigeonattack has been hanging out with her fairy-tale loving little cousins far too much.

Franz tapped his foot. "I was not being sure I was actually going to be feeling this way, but I am now knowing for sure that I am actually being rather impatient to get a move on with my session. Could we pleaseâ€"|"?"

"Good idea," pidge agreed. "Now. Who's reading first?"

As everyone settled down, Wing picked up his tablet. "Your first piece of fanmail is from Aranel Azamai:

Franz,

If you had to date one person in that room who would it be?

Aranel

P.S. Yeah, it's a recycled question, but it was my question."

"Oh, God, not these," Laura groaned.

"Shut up, I want to hear," said Tom.

Franz leaned back in his seat pensively. "Penny. Next!"

Penny fidgeted, and everyone else stared in surprise.

"How refreshingly straightforward," Wing finally managed.

Franz shrugged. "I was having a girlfriend, once. Or twice. Several girlfriends, actually. The one I am currently bestowing my adorations on is not present. But Penny is looking a little bit like her. Thus. Next, please."

Penny picked her tablet. "From Starkid Hufflepuff:

OK, Franz, here we go. OK, what is your favorite ice cream flavor? So many to choose from, but I'm sure you'll make up your mind. Even though I can't ;) "

"Commercially accessible or specialty? Ben and Jerry's Rum Raisin for the former, vanilla ice with a hint of Merlot for the latter."

"You like your alcohol, don't you?" pidge asked pleasantly.

"It is being in trace amounts and for culinary artistry."

"S'cool. I like clam pasta with white wine. My mom makes it fabulously."

"And from Wasp," Laura said, picking up the pace.

"_Franz_

Everyone has been asking about Ottra songs, what about Wingelby? Franz, what song would you pick for them? After some consideration I am stuck between (at least for the time this whole thing appears to be taking place) Losing my Mind and Outta my Head, both by Daughtry."

Franz smiled apologetically. "I am sorry. I am not very good with popular contemporary pieces outside the genre of hard rock/heavy metal (I do love Rammstein, simply brilliant German group) but out of the pieces I know, I'd recommend 'Untouched' by The Veronicas."

Wing and Shelby's expressions were both frighteningly stony.

"You did not just say that," Shelby said darkly.

Laura snorted with graceful laughter.

"And that piece," pidge said joyfully, "will show up in a fic soon to come. Soon as our work is complete here, we're all going on a merry fairy tale romp!" Ignoring their blank looks of say what?, she moved right on. "Next we've one from Fire!"

Franz

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

Ps Wing, you are correct. I apologize for my error.

Fire

Most unfortunately, Wing was too busy searching a certain song on a certain Google-affiliated video sharing site to reply, but he nodded once.

Franz folded his hands. "That is being too easy. On a Moroccan beach, in a lounge chair, under a big umbrella, and sipping a strawberry daiquiri with a little umbrella. You know, the little toothpick ones. NEXT."

Penny scrolled down. "From Sage:

Thanks so much for answering my questions, Laura!"

Laura smiled tiredly.

"Okay, and on to Franz:

- 1) What's the most badass thing you've ever done?
- 2) What do you think of Nigel?
- 3) Um... give us a fun factoid about yourself?
- 4) And if you don't mind... what HIVE pairings do you ship, if any?

Thanks!"

Franz ticked the questions off on his fingers. "I do badass things every moment I am awake, each one more badass than the last, so your question is immaterial. Nigel is my best friend ever."

Nigel grinned.

"I believe FlutterJack fans need to go jump off a cliff. FlutterMac is far superior."

"What?" Shelby exploded, leaping from her armchair. "The hell are youâ€”â€”| They're both godawful, I totally sailâ€”"

"I like Pinkie Pie!" Penny yelled cheerfully.

"Wait a sec," Otto said confusedly. "Are you guys talking about that little girls' shoâ€œ"

Laura slapped a hand over his mouth a second too late. "_My Little Ponies: Friendship is Magic_ is for _all_ ages to enjoy," she hissed. "Or at least, that's what you gotta believe if you want to survive around here."

"You're kidding me," he said, voice a little muffled.

"I'm not."

Luckily, Franz and Shelby's discourse was a little too heated for them to hear and attend to the misspoken comment. Only Penny scowled daggers at Otto for his unfortunate words.

"_In any case_," Franz said loudly, "as for the last question, I am shipping all the canon HIVE ships. With a few modifications. Sometimes. NEXT!"

Tom, Shelby, and pidge all pondered his wisdom for a few moments. The others were a little lacking in fan-ish vocabulary.

"From Kukipye," said Otto.

"_Ok. Lemme see, what shall I do for q question for you, Franz? I don't think I'll be asking you any _ questions, because you seem very innocent except when you are 'Silent Death'._"

You obviously have to have secret junky-sweet-full of MSG-food stashed around HIVE, and just keep up the pretence that you're hungry all the time so no-one will catch on... so. This is your question.

Where are all your secret stashes? And please give DEEEeeeeetailed descriptions...

*Oh, and I think you are secretly jealous of Wing because Shelby likes him. You want Shelby, admit it..."

Franz's expression was nothing short of pure, unadulterated indignance. "Alright, _first off_, I would _never_ publicly disclose the locations of my emergency cupboards. _Secondly_, if you are knowing all this stuff regarding my habits and nicknames, etcetera, you should also be knowing that _I already have a girlfriend_. She is lovely and rich and rather sweet, and anyway, how could a person as attractive as me _not_ be already taken? That is the question."

"And I don't 'like' Wing in any non-platonic way," Shelby added, for good measure.

"NEXT."

"From Schnizel," said Nigel.

"_Franz: i have several questions because I can't decide so... What's your favourite food? And who would be your perfect girlfriend? (or boyfriend lol)"_

"Ah, good questionâ€|" Franz scratched his chin. "I am rather fond of rum-spiced Belgian truffles. My perfect girlfriend is the one I already have: good-looking, well-endowed, and a fabulous kisser. I am not gay. Sorry to disappoint."

Crowd goes _Awwwwwww!_

"By well-endowed, you mean _rich_, right?" Shelby asked lightly.

"I mean every sense of the word."

Shelby upped and slapped him. "MISOGYNIST PIG."

"Next, next, NEXT!" Franz cried desperately. "And no, I wasn't talking about her boobs! She has very nice ones, yes, but I like her because she's smart and funny and all that! And very, very, _feminist._"

Shelby settled back down, eyes mistrustful. "Next: fromâ€|" She paused to let a slow grin spread across her face. "I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly!"

From: Fly

First of all...I solemnly swear that I haven't laughed this much since I saw my brother's expression after I showed him a WingXOtto slash fic.

"Bloody fâ€" what was that?" Otto demanded. Shelby hushed him, smiling serenely.

"_That was really, really funny._

"Anyways. WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO GET A DECENT ANSWER? I mean, half of Taylor Swift's songs are practically WRITTEN for Ottra, and what do I get? MONSTER and BLUE FREAKING DANUBE.

Honestly. Mark my words, Laura, one day a black haired-blue eyed Italian girl with a curious ability to control people with her voice is going to saunter in the scene and get Otto, and we won't even be able to SAY anything because YOU DID NOT KISS THE BOY. Mark. My. Words."

Sheesh. At the end of the day when you both are snogging each other's face off, you'll thank us."

Otto was too busy utilizing the Urban Dictionary app to comment, but Laura had to be restrained on both sides by Penny and Shelby, whose vice-like grip from one hand was almost inadequate to contain her Fiery Rage.

"Or not. Meh. I'll make sure I'm some place incredibly remote if you decide to make good on your threat. Armed with a gun. And an army of androids.

To: Silent Death

From: Fly, who LOVES the way you shot down that helicopter when Nigel was threatened.

Snickers, or Mars? Which do you prefer? I can never decide. also, how is that, after 2 years at HIVE, your English hasn't improved? You're doing it to annoy them, aren't you?"

"Why, thank you!" Franz said joyfully. "I prefer Snickers. And of course I do it to annoy them!"

"Hey, _ I_ have a question," Laura yelled. "Why is it that _Franz_ gets all the easiest questions, and not only that, people get to use _his_ time to harass the _others_, especially those of us who have _already_ gone, especially _me?_"_

She was conveniently ignored. pidge apologizes.

Otto was looking rather green. "Ewâ€| Ahem. Damn you, Urban Dictionary. I am no longer innocent, and I now have a stomachache. The next question is from tsukil23:

"_Just how exactly do you manage to totally BAUS everyone, even Wing of all people, in those virtual reality simulations at the H.I.V.E.? Huh? Is there something you're not telling us? I'm not going to accept anything short of a full-blown confession about how you have been training under Raven's wing (-hah) too, or something like that!_"

Love,

tsuki"

"People do not 'BAUS' me," Wing said quietly. "Perhaps they may surpass me in many things, but I refuse to be 'BAUS'-ed."

"Yeah?" asked Shelby. "Then how what do you call it when Franz shows up out of nowhere and then _bam _you're out of the game?"

"That's not _BAUS-_ ing," Wing countered.

Franz watched them go. "Well, tsuki, usually Wing and Shelby are the only ones who pose any difficulty."

"Hey!" protested practically everyone else in the room.

"And they are always too busy squabbling with each other anyway. Plus, I'm Silent Death. Enough said. Oh, and training under Raven's wing (ahaha) would be lovely, were it not for the fact that I am the _tiniest_ bit scared of her. NEXT."

"The next piece of mail is from Venom," said Wing.

"_Well Franz, honestly I believe there will be plenty of question impeding on your personal life... sooo, I'm going to have you impede on the others'. How many of the people in that room do you personally believe are in love? Who? With whom?_"

-Your Friendly Neighborhood Venom"

"Thank you for your conscientiousness," said Franz. "Like I said, I ship canon."

"Me, too," agreed Shelby. "Exceptâ€¦ you knowâ€¦ _that_ one. The one with me. Cuz it makes no sense."

Tom sneezed. "Sure, yeah. Next: from Writey Starkid:"

"_Dear Silent Death,_"

My main question is, if you could give Colonel Francisco a detention, what would you make him do? On a side note, I would chew Hubba Bubba Strawberry-Watermelon.

By the way, where are Nero and Raven? Because I'd love to get some awkward Naven questions up in here. :)

Writey"

Franz stared off into the distance, a soft look on his face. "I'd make him sing La Donna e Mobile."

"Ah, Verdiâ€¦"

"You are knowing _Rigoletto_, Wing?"

"Yes. It is one of my favorite operas."

[_(youtube) /watch?v=xCFEk6Y8TmM_]

"And wouldn't it be nice if we had Raven and Nero here? Unfortunately, both are predisposedâ€¦" Franz sighed. "And even if they were here, they would probably be the party poopers."

Laura announced the next one. "From Scarlet Silverweaver:

Dear Franz,"

I didn't notice you chime in when this question was asked, so now I'm curious. In the end, would you rather be back at home, oblivious to the supervillain world, than at H.I.V.E.?

Sincerely,

Scarlet"

Franz nodded slowly. "I think I would have known about it eventually, my daddy being who he is. I really do like HIVE's bottomless food stocks. Soâ€¦ _ja_, I love it there. Next, please."

"From , " said Penny.

Dear Franz,"

"What is the vilest thing the staff ever did to kids at H.I.V.E.? I want to know so I can laugh at the relative ease I manipulate out of things. Also, do you have a crush on Shelby? Because there is a little rumor going around... If you don't how do you think she would react to you asking her out? You see what I did there? I synchronized mortifying you and Shelby. Thought it would be funny. Kinda like a Diet Coke truck crashing into a Mentos truck. Yeah. I used a metaphor. Because that is how I roll.

Sincerely, Invader Tor."

"I think that's more irony of situation than metaphor," said Franz. "Your comparison with the beverage trucks, that is. And I have no idea why people keep asking about me and Shelby; we are being great friends but I am taken and she is as well!"

Shelby, whose expression had, up until then, been relatively nodding-y and _um-hm_-ing-y, sputtered like she'd just choked on too much Menthos-Diet Coke Combo Special. "_Excuse_ me?"

"And as hard as they work us, the staff is actually generally pretty nice. Except Colonel Francisco. But don't tell him I said that, please, I am already having detention with him twice this week."

"What happens in this room stays in this room," assured pidge. "Sort of. Next, we have an assortment of mail from one person I happen to know _very, very, very_ well (I'm talking about you, Sister-Dearest) and half of which are pointless. I'll just fire 'em off. What chocolate company does your father work at?"

Franz sniffed. "My father does not 'work'. He owns a large quantity of shares in Godhiva and Hershey's."

"Spinach or broccoli?"

"Broccoli."

"And from tomcu:

What is your favorite time to eat? Breakfast, brunch, lunch, linner/dunch, or dinner?

Personally, I like dinner b/c the best food comes out. Plus there is dessert!"

"All. Picking one would be like picking my favorite child."

"And finally," said pidge. "From SmarterThanTheCurrentPresiden:

Dear Franz,

This might not put in the story, and I completely understand if it's not, but I'm bored so I'm writing it any way. Some people have been so cruel to the others, and even though I find it amusing I feel for you so I'm going by east I mean original probably.

1. What is the weirdest dream you've ever had? Because if you're dad owns a chocolate factory you'd eat alot of it (and if Wing comment on 'alot' not being a word I know, english is one of my favorite subjects, it's not a word)and I speak from experience that sugar causes weird dreams.

2. What was you're real reaction when you found out you're dad was a super villain and he didn't tell you? I know I'd be shocked if someone randomly said to me after being kidnapped "Stewart? Of course he works for GLOVE. Very successful in the occupation of evilness. He

went to HIVE just as you now will. This question also doubles for Nigel and Wing."

Wing lifted. "English is your favorite subject? Hm. Very apparent."

Shelby frowned. "Be nice, Wing."

"Ahâ€|" Franz folded his hands in his lap, leaning back. "Sweet memoriesâ€| Chocolate gives me lovely chocolate-related dreams, which I, of course, have plenty of. I remember this one dream where I was flying through a place that was sort of like the chocolate room in Willy Wonka's factory except everything was shades of brown and some white and the sky was pink. It was fantastic. There was a giant chocolate bunny floating on a cloud and it said my name."

"Sounds like a really good dream," Tom said earnestly.

"My first reaction when Daddy got the letter wasn't all that impressive, actually. I was too busy enjoying an absolutely divine blueberry muffin. It was at breakfast, you see," Franz explained. "But then when it settled in, I was pretty surprised. And I might have stormed over to Daddy's study to demand answers, but then once he told me everything (sort of) I calmed down."

"I do not think my dad was a supervillain at the time of my entrance to HIVE," said Wing quietly. "He only worked for one. There was great shock once I found out everything."

"It's all in book two of the series," pidge said helpfully.

Nigel bit his lip. "Hearing more about my dad so soon after he disappeared was pretty awful."

And that was all.

"And thus, we end the session on a note of melancholy," pidge muttered, brushing away a tear. "Congratulations, Franz. You're done."

Franz was too busy staring off into space, lost in memoryland.

"Upcoming still are Penny, Nigel, Shelby, and Wing."

Penny cheered, apparently having gone from one extreme (see: escape attempt) to another. Nigel groaned. Shelby's face seemed to be doing a mixture of the two, and Wing remained impassive.

"In that order."

Penny cheered again. "Yay-uh! You mailer-people don't know enough about me; I'm totally safe!~"

Nigel flopped onto his back, blinking unseeingly at the ceiling. "Oh, joy."

pidge smiled brightly, stretching her arms way over her head. "In the meantime, I'm going to go take a stroll through Central Park. Need some air. I'd invite you all along, but in light of Penny's recent

endeavor (see: escape attempt) I'd rather not. So. Take a nap, raid the fridge, use the restroom while I'm gone, okay? Just don't annoy each other too much. I need everyone in one piece upon my return. And no trying to escape; I've got y'all under lockdown, got that?"

General nodding all around.

"Cool. Ciao."

As soon as she left, Penny threw her hands up into the air. "Alright, everybody, it's time to party!"

7. Camouflage-y

****pigeonattack** has been a little busy. She apologizes profusely for the wait, and for her very rude lack of replying to the reviews that help make her life flowers and sunshine. Her acquaintances will testify that she has been in a self-induced swamp. Again. Surprise, surprise. Oh, pidge, whenever will you learn? The fall semester's hard enough without a gigantor side project I've kicked into gear, dammit.**

****I** mean, it would all be perfectly fine and dandy, and I'd have plenty of time left over every evening to write/doodle/etc., except that my truly beloved music teachers both seem to have all of a sudden gotten it into their heads that I have gobs of free time this fall, two or three of which need to be filled up with each respective instrument each day. So, I've been going a little nuts.^^**

****Okeeâ€|** shut up, pidge, no one's here to hear you whine.**

****ON WITH THE TALE OF MAIL.****

(Oh, and by the way, thank you so very much to all you anonymous reviewers. I wish I could personally huggle each and every one of you, but being anon's you'll have to settle for this happy little wave.)*

* * *

><p>Chapter VII

.

Camouflage-y

-.-

pidge returned to a rather depressing scene.

Four (4) Alphas, four of the cleverest, most talented, most deviously gifted youths in the world, were struggling to get one (1) party hat on one (1) struggling boy.

"I won't, I won't, I _won't!_" Nigel half-squeaked, batting away the colorful cone, so that the string Penny was pulling suddenly snapped back and smacked Franz's ear, which caused the ear's owner to cry out

and step back on Shelby's toe, which caused Shelby to curse loudly and Tom to rush away from the scuffle to cover little Otto's ears.

Wing shook his head, the little gold puff at the top of his head shimmering in the light. "Give up," he advised. "It is much easier that way."

"I'm not putting on any party hat, especially under coercion. That's illegal."

Six sneezes ricocheted off the walls.

Nigel glared. "What? Just because we're HIVE students doesn't mean we've noâ€” PIDGE!"

And the pigeon's presence was finally noticed and noted.

A few minutes later, the party hats from who-knows-where had been dismantled (puff of gold in the art bin, cone in the recycling bin), the random fluttering confetti had been neatly scooped together into a Ziploc baggie ("This could definitely come in handy at a future instance," Shelby had muttered, stowing it into her pocket), and nine mischievous little rascals were sitting prettily in a circle of armchairs, awaiting the commencement.

Penny pulled her legs into criss-cross-applesauce. "Shall we?"

pidge grinned. "The first one's a great one to start off with. Anyone?"

Laura picked up a tablet. "From Shnizel:

Erm... What exactly are your skills? For example, Otto has that interfacing thing, Laura her hacking abilities, Shelby her lock picking skills and etc... what about you?"

"Acquisition and Redistribution!" Penny said immediately. "Tom and I are both wizzes at that. Right, Otto?"

Otto nodded, smiling fondly. "Yeah. Definitely."

"So we pretty much rock at anything that goes with it. Lock picking, hackingâ€”"

"And cracking," Laura pointed out. "'Hacking' is the umbrella term for programming, writing, etcetera. 'Cracking' is the malicious side. Which, ah, is what most of us here do."

"_Exactemente_," Penny said. "We're great with scaling buildings even without grappler technology, reasoning with people in positions of power, even reading mapsâ€”"

"The horrors." Tom shuddered. "Hate maps."

"â€” so though we may not be extraordinarily talented with any of those in particular, we're well-rounded enough to go places."

Shelby nodded in admiration. "Wow. Oh, and by the way, I do much more than pick locks. Just saying. _Anyway_. Next, we've mail fromâ€”| oh,

man, this is goodâ€¦ mail from Diamond Ninja.

Dear Penny,

Do you consider yourself a con artist? I realize that many people consider that to be an offensive term, but perhaps you disagree. I remember that it was mentioned you only convinced people to give you things, instead of stealing.

Also, if you found out that you and your friends were the subject of a somewhat popular book series, what would you think? And if said hypothetical series were to be made into a movie, who would you want to play you? The others?

How much do you think Otto has changed since you came to the H.I.V.E.? It had been at least three years since you had seen him, no?

What do you think of Tom's apparent... interest in Wing?

Do you follow any fandoms?

Thanks for doing this!

Kuno

"

Penny whistled. "That's a lot of questions." She ticked them off on her fingers. "'Con artist' is definitely not a nice term. You're right; I _convince_ people to _give_ us things. They're happy, we're happy, and everyone's happy. Yay! Umâ€¦ a book series? That's be pretty cool. Seriously. And I have no idea who would play meâ€¦ or the othersâ€¦ aw, man, I feel so out of it. I don't know my actors well enough to decide, really. Um, but I'd definitely have Johnny Depp playing Nero. He'd do a good job with that. Interesting thought, a book seriesâ€¦"

"Otto hasn't changed a bit. Well, mainly. Still the clever little kid he always was, except now he's.. he's opened himself up quite a bit, I think. Mainly to you, Laura."

"What the hell is _that_ supposed to mean?"

"When you two speak in synch, it's bloody trippy. As for Tom and Wingâ€¦ y'ver heard of the term 'bromance'? Who am I kidding, of course you have! Yeah, that's what's going on. Wing's only got eyes for another, anyway. It's painfully obvious. Even in the short time I've known them, Wing and Shhhhhhhhhâ€¦"

"Gag off, please," pidge said calmly. Shelby retracted her pillow with a hard expression.

"Ahem. I follow Harry Potter, on and off. I like Pinkie Pie."

"You've said." Otto scrolled. "Aranel Azamai:

_Dear Penny,

>What has been your favorite moment at HIVE?"

"Um, I liked it when the toilet on the second floor exploded and spewed out random blue gunk."

pidge balked. "Hey, don't say that; now I'll have to write about it!"

Tom cleared his throat. "Yes, that was quite a highlight. From Reensiel7â€| who is currently at the mall with her cousins loading random cosmetics onto her person. How peculiar. Who would ever want that?"

Bonjour Penny!

Couple easy Q's here. I know, I know...you were hoping for some really good and juicy ones. Well I'm currently busy *see above note to pidgey* soooo you're gonna get easy/cliche.

1. What did you do to get into HIVE? Just your abilities or did you do something big to make HIVE notice you?

2. What languages do you speak besides English. I kinda have in my mind that you are an international gal.

Apologies for the quick note but I've got to go find a mirror..."

Penny shrugged. "Who knows the method to the madness of the recruiters? I guess it was our abilities. We'd recently managed tracked several Shrouds in the area. We'd never quite given up on Otto, you see."

Otto smiled fondly. Again. It was real sweet.

"I speak a little French, Spanish, German, Mandarin, and Swahili, just 'cause those languages are pretty core. And I can ask for a cup of tea in seventeen different languages. Gotta know the basics. I've never actually gone far from London, but London's so international, I've never really needed to."

"_Sie sprechen Deutsch_" Franz asked, impressed.

"_Wie ich schon sagte_, nur __ein wenig."_ Penny scratched her head. "_Genug, um__rund um Berlin__, ohne __total peinlich__bekommen. _That was probably all wrong..."

"Not bad, not bad," Franz said. "From Lord Sanguine:

What is the most embarrassing thing you did before coming to H.I.V.E.?"

"Oh, not theseâ€|" Penny sighed.

"Otto and Tom should be feeling free to help out," Franz added helpfully.

"Please don't," said Penny.

"We shall!" Otto sat forward, a broad smirk on his mouth. "There was this one stormy night when the lights went out and she walked into

dresser, which was open, and which contained a large quantity of feminine undergarmentsâ€œ"

Tom beamed. "And that time she was supposed to get the PM's secretary's notebook but ended up getting his journal, which made her turn, like, five shades of red, all of which I caught on cameraâ€œ"

"And that one time _I_ found _her_ diaryâ€œ"

"But you gave it back; you were no fun back thenâ€œ"

"Hey! I was _so_â€œ"

"MEHHHHH!"

"Sorry, Penny." Cough.

"Yeah, sorryâ€œ|. Did we go too far?"

Shelby patted her on the back. "You're awesome, girl. Next, a question from Fire:

_Penny,
>Where do you see yourself in ten years?
-Fire"_

In a rather miffed voice, Penny responded, "Ruling from behind the scenes as dominator of the entire South Pacific. Weather's nice."

"Agreed," said Wing. "Next, from mosgem:

have you ever had feelings about otto? try not to make laura TOO mad when you answer the question"

"WHATâ€œ"

"Honestly, Laura, we need to work on your anger management issues!" Shelby actively restrained her dear friend.

"Nada," said Penny firmly. "Although a lot of the other girls at the orphanage did. Very mysterious and powerful and influential and not a bad lookerâ€œ| Yeah, lots of us crushed on him at one point or another."

"Really?"

"Yes, Otto. Does it come as a surprise?"

"It comes as a surprise," Shelby and Wing chorused. Laura remained noticeably silent.

"And from Invader Tor," said Nigel.

"_Dear Penny,
>Oh, Otto. Ever the voice of reason. I agree. It's a little girl show. My baby cousin makes me watch it. *shudders at thought* Sorry Penny. It is. Anyways, what is the most outrageous thing you have ever done at HIVE? I mean like pranks and such. There is a surprising shortage of thereof in the boo- I mean... uhhh.. never mind. And,

what is the weirdest thing you have ever come across at HIVE? And, what is the biggest thing you have ever got away with? And, what is your second favorite color? And why is Colonel Francisco so frickin' MEAN? He just seems so heartless. He reminds me of Quaritch from Avatar. MEAN.
Sincerely, Invader Tor."_

"You have a serious issue if you don't like that awesome show," Penny said darkly as Otto nodded sagely at his own wisdom. "The characterizations are very well done, the animation is tastefully executed, and the plots aren't overly sugary. Don't hate, man, haters aren't cool. Anyway, umâ€¦ there was that toiletâ€¦ which answers two of your questionsâ€¦ I like a lot of colors. Blue's nice. So's black. I have a soft spot for pink, as you can tell from my hair, I guessâ€¦ and Colonel Francisco's not really _mean,_ per se. He's just very demanding and he pushes us to our limits. It's for our own good, I guessâ€¦"

Franz dissolved into a hacking fit.

As the others squabbled, pigeonattack read the next piece of mail on her own and quickly deleted it, then penned a response.

From StarkidHufflepuff:

So I read this, and I'm like, "When does this story take place?" Because Wing and Shelby aren't together, but Tom and Penny are there. It also sounds like they've read the books, but they aren't at that point in time, if that makes sense. Sorry if there's an obvious answer.

To StarkidHufflepuff and Other Headscratching Readers Out There:

_I'm glad you asked. My stories, like those of most fanfiction writers, all take place in different universes. Sounds awfully sci-fi, but what I mean is that something happening in one story of mine has no effect whatsoever on the others. I usually take that handy concept a little further in de-chroning my stories, so that no story takes place during any particular time in the series. _Once upon a Pigeon's Prom_, for example, contradicts all the events of book four on, if we take Lucy into consideration. In case you all haven't guessed, I don't really want to write Lucy. She complicates things.^ Maybe in the future, if someone asks for itâ€¦ So to answer your question, this story takes everything I like from the series and throws chronological order out the window. XD_

"I hope the next one is nicer," Penny said, huffing a little.

Still hiccupping slightly, Otto took up his tablet. "From Sage:

_And now the questions for Penny:

>1)What in God's name did you put in everyone's snacks? And is it commercially available?
2)What is your favorite book? And why?

>3)What is the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you? (You're right, I don't know enough about you. But I will find out...*evil grin*)
4)What is "My Little Ponies: Friendship is Magic" and why is everyone (except Otto) obsessed with it? Should this be my new fiction addiction?"_

"Whoo, that's a lot!" Nevertheless, Penny smiled contentedly. "It was a special formula of mine. Real complex. Unfortunately, it's not yet commercially available, but as soon as I finish haggling with the techie who patented the components, it'll be out on the market and I'll start pulling in the cash! Um, my favorite book is _The Catcher in the Rye_."

Five gasps rose.

"You're kidding," Tom said incredulously. "_That_ one? Of allâ€"

"Yeah. What it lacks in plot it more than makes up for in characterization, hilarious musings, and really deep thoughts. Question three has already been answered several times overâ€| And as for _Friendship is Magic_, it's a TV show designed by Lauren Faust, the genius behind _The Powerpuff Girls_ and _Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends_. She wanted to create a little girls' show that boys and adults could watch without wanting to shoot themselves. It's got a huge male following of guys of all ages. They call themselves bronies. People like it because of its developed plots and good characterizations. Unfortunately, the fanfiction stinks. I haven't yet found a single good one."

Otto muttered something under his breath.

"From Wasp," said Franz.

"_Penny,
>Who do you think is the least deserving to be at
H.I.V.E.?
Wasp"_

"Erâ€|" Penny pursed her lips. "I think everyone here is equally deserving. Everyone has gotten here through their individual merits."

"That was a lame answer," said Franz. "In length, that is, so I am reading another question. From Fanfic-Crazy07:

So Penny, who's your favourite singer from One Direction? Do you like gummy bears? What's the weirdest prank you ever pulled off in your life? Have you ever stolen Otto's hair dye before (no need to be ashamed of the gray hairs, hon) ? Is Barbie your inspiration? Does Tom have stinky feet? What's your favourite Disney movie? Am I creeping you out with my incessant questioning? No? Okay! What do you think of being kidnapped and held as hostages while fangirls (and guys) like me (and others) try to pry into your personal life? Can you steal Percy's pen sword for me?" Franz scratched his head. "Who is Percy?"

"A demigod," said Shelby.

"Hah-hah," said Wing.

"No, I'm serious, he really is a demigod. You see, he'sâ€"

"Shush, Shel. Wing don't get it. You only be makin' him jealous."

"Darn, right, pidgey."

Penny whistled. "That is a _lot_! Alright. I don't listen to them much (more of a Tom thing, that), but Harry's real cute. I love gummy bears. Um, there was that exploding toiletâ€¦ I keep mentioning that, don't I? Whatev, it was a good one. No, and I don't have grey hair, actuallyâ€¦ I don't like Barbie. Her anatomy's screwy and she's a shameful misogynist hourglass on legs. I've never gotten close enough to Tom's feet to smell them, oddly enoughâ€¦"

"I don't have stinky feet."

"â€¦ I like a lot of them. I like Mulan. She's badass. No, I've seen creepier. I'm cool with this; no one's asking me anything racy or overly prying-y. Though I feel for my colleagues. I'm really sorry; I'm not a half blood myself, so I can't get into camp. Also, I'm scared of big swords."

"Me, too," said Franz.

Nigel read the next one. "Fromâ€¦ Oh, dear. From I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly:

_To: P. Richards, suspected blonde
>From: Fly

You are SUCH a little 'imma-better-than-you-nah-nah-na-na-nah' upstart. YOU HONESTLY THOUGHT THAT YOU COULD OUTSMART THE VETERANS, NEWB? You're just really ONE BOOK OLD, and you thought you could-oh forget it.
>Although it would have served you right if a helicopter fell on your head, upstart!<p>

But unfortunately, like you said, you ARE only really a book old (just ONE book old and you think you're better than the old timers, annoying little upstart etc) so we can't really ask you anything.

But I know what I want to ask you-what's your real hair colour? You're a BLONDE, AREN'T YOU? A really, REALLY Barbie-platinum-blonde type of blondie, I bet. Because I'm not particularly knowledgeable about hair dyes, but...I don't think a shade like pink will show up very well on dark hair colours. I mean, blonde hair dye has hydrogen peroxide in it. It's used to disinfect lavatories. I don't think a kid like you would use really strong dyes like that.

So I think you ARE blonde."

"Erâ€¦" Penny looked unsure how to begin to answer. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be an upstart or anything. I was justâ€¦ ah, how to put thisâ€¦ testing my boundaries?" She glanced up nervously towards the ceiling as if expecting a helicopter to come crashing down at any given moment.

"Sure," said Pidge.

"And I'm not disclosing my real hair color. Of course it's not pink. I'm not saying anything further, though."

"It's really actually green," Tom confided.

"No, she was born with blue hair; I've seen pictures," Otto said emphatically.

Wing pulled up the next question. "From StarkidHufflepuff:"

Woud you rather play Nintendo WII or Xbox 360? I like Xbox, personally. The controllers are so much better."

"Xbox 360 with Kinect," Penny said immediately. "I love jumping up and down and nearly bonking my head on the ceiling. It was so awesome when we got one at the orphanage."

"Damn," said Otto. "I missed that just by a few years, didn't I?"

"And next," said pidge, "we have mail from West of the Moonbeam:

_Penny. Penny, Penny, Penny.

>I'm not going to insult you by saying that although we know little about you, that this doesn't mean this interview will not be excruciating and revealing for you. Sitting comfortably?
My question for you is how do you think you will cope not being one of the special ones anymore? Previously in your life Tom and your good self were the elite. Now at H.I.V.E you are not extraordinary. How will you stand out?

>Regards, and better luck with the next escape
Moonbeam"_

Penny smiled. "Yeahâ€| after Otto left, Tom and I were the elite, but I think we're pretty cool with being among really incredible people, right, bro?"

Everyone went a little misty eyed. Even Wing.

Laura baulked at the next message. "Heyâ€| another message from someone Penny's already answered. This is against the rules, isn't it?"

pidge rolled her eyes. "Rules, shmools."

"Not that I'm complaining." Laura smiled sweetly at Penny. "I wouldnae deprive you of another opportunity to receive one from _her_â€| "

Penny scratched her head. "Who?"

pidgey giggled. "No, not Canada."

"Say what?"

Shelby suddenly gave a huge gasp. "Oh my gosh, heroes unite!"

"Boku Hetalia!~"

"Oh, dear," Wing muttered, as five minutes of pure sisterly squee and shipping-speak passed with general confusion all around, until pidge finally dusted off her t-shirt and flopped backwards into the armchair.

"My, my, we've really got to stop doing this random

super-hype-over-random-references thing."

Shelby was humming softly to herself.

"From: I'mTheGirlWhoLearnedToFly," Laura said loudly.

"Good grief!" Penny wailed.

"I know my last review was long, even by my own standards, but...Penny, are you aware of the popular anime/manga 'Naruto'? In case you are, I assume you know who Sakura Haruno is?"

"Yeahâ€¦| Her hair's not bad, reallyâ€¦|"

"_In case you don't, for your benefit and everyone else's... While the humourless-borderline-emo top-level badass ninja with duck ** (Sasuke) and the anime version of Hitler's blonde-haired-blue-eyed Nazi vision (Naruto) fight all the bad guys (and each other)..."_

"Hold up!" pidge squealed. "That totally reminds me! **xcailly-dot-deviantart-dot-com /art/Math-with-Naruto-213349493**. Epicâ€¦| just for any Sasuke fans/haters out there. Go on, please, Laura."

Laura increased her volume. No one was sure whether it was for punctuation of the fact that she was speaking, or whether it was simply to go along with the ebb and flow of the dictation. _"She just STANDS THERE in the background like a TOTAL DINGBAT. Sakura Haruno-giving a new meaning to the sentence, 'Way to just stand there in the background with a kunai in your hand doing nothing...idiot'."_

"Um, no." Penny shook her head vehemently. "She fights, too. Only a lot less. Because the camera's always focused on Naruto and Sasuke's newest jutsu."

"She has pink hair. And she has showed me that the only thing worse than being a blondie...is being a PINKY."

Penny waved her pinky finger. "Like this?"

"_FOR THE LOVE OF THE TORTURED SOULS STITCHED ONTO HADES'S UNDERPANTS, CHANGE YOUR HAIR COLOUR, UPSTART!_"_

"Who, me?"

"_Without wax,
>Fly"

"I'm not changing my hair color," Penny announced. "Nope, nope, nope!"

"Not even to white?"

"No, Otto."

"White's the latest thing. You should know that."

"Agreed," pidge said grudgingly. "After black, of course, the

greatest percentage of interesting characters in anime tend to have white hair. Jiraiya, Prussia, that random kid in _Destiny Deoxys _who was afraid of PokÃ©mon!"

"Yay," said Otto. "I'm being compared to a pervy sage, a dead nation, and a random kid afraid of PokÃ©mon."

"Prussia lives, man. Hey, wait, you watch Naruto, too?"

"I used to make him!" Penny confided. "He'd come down into the common room every once in a blue moon, and we'd always make the most of it."

pidge nodded, glancing down at her clipboard. "Cooooool!" Anyway, I've written about 419 words on various anime-related stuff that, while very entertaining to people such as myself, has probably put the less-inclined faction of our audience to sleep."

Franz was asleep.

pidge walked over and smacked him on the head with her clipboard.

"Agh! Compressed particleboard!"

"The word's _clipboard_."

"The material's particleboard."

pidge studied her clipboard appraisingly.

"That one looks like masonite," Laura piped up.

"Eh. You, my dear Franz, get to read the next and final message."

Rubbing his head, Franz muttered something incomprehensible and doubtlessly rude in German. "Ehem. This last one is from Kukipye:

"Penny, Penny, Penny... hmm..."

Have you ever had a crush on Otto? Are you and Tom siblings, or just good friends?

Also... I can never imagine you with pink hair... always with blonde or brown hair..."

"Is my hair my only interesting feature?" Penny ran a hand through her rosy locks. "It _is_ very nice though!" definitely worth all the attention it's been receiving!" Anyway. Tom, Otto, and I are just friends, but fantastic, legit-tight friends at that. And now, I've added a bunch more buddies to the circle." She waved a hand around.

pidge looked about to be overcome with a fresh wave of emotion. "I think!" I think we all need a little break. You've all been wonderful. Thank you for your cooperation. I have enjoyed this greatly."

And though no one said it aloud, it seemed most everyone generally agreed. As the rays of the late afternoon sun streamed through the stylish windows of the equally hip little Studio 254, three Alphas were lounging languidly, two were eating (one of whom was just doing so to placate his friend, who was firing off chocolate recommendations), two were staring at the high-tech tablets like they held one of the greatest secrets in all tech-y history (which they did), and one seemed to be meditating.

The remaining Alpha was making a few business decisions regarding the alarming rate evening was descending at. (As lovely and shippy evening had the potential to be, darkness would only make the remaining interviewees drowsy and less interesting.) She was also making some phone calls.

"Oiâ€| Yeah, Kuno, if you could join me at the other place in a little bitâ€| Nigel probably won't cause too much of a fuss, but I'll need back up for the last twoâ€| I'm sending out the chopper right now. Oh, it's already outside your window? Gee, that's fast. Alright, then. So, you can make it, right? Yeah, message me and let me know." Beep. Tap-tap. "Hey there, Tangyâ€" Ahahaâ€| No. Please don'tâ€| Seriously, Fly, these Alphas need me alive for a few more hours. Right. Yes. Do you have a chopper? Oh, right, you can fly. Sort of. So, send me a message when you've stomped down the last of that nasty homework, okay? Bring the knitting needles." Beep. Tap-tap. "Moonbeam, I'm taking you up on your offerâ€| Yes, I'm quite sure you offered. You remember, right? Either way, you need to be hereâ€| yeah, _that's_ what the random helicopter's doing on your roof. Sorry. Hope I didn't, like, break a chimney. Or somethingâ€| Message me when you're on your way!~"

Eight pairs of eyes stared blankly in her direction.

"What?" pidge stowed away her phone.

"You're bringing buddies?" Nigel croaked.

"Yeah. Don't worry- they won't get here till maybe the end of your session."

Nigel exhaled in pure, unadulterated relief.

Shelby squealed. "Oh, yay, I'd love to meet your buddies!"

Wing rubbed his eyes. "If they're anything like you, pigeonattackâ€|"

"Oh, they're very much like me." pidge smiled happily. "You're in for a real treat! By the way, we're moving locales to get an extra three hours of daylight, and also just 'cause I feel like it. Everyone in the Shroudâ€" we's headin' to Studio 254- Golden Gate Park, San Fran."

8. Interlude: I Heart Helicopters

**With great regret, pigeonattack wishes to apologize for taking so long to emerge from her little hermit hole to slap this very small piece into the world. However, she has had great fun writing this in the little spaces of air time with her head barely above the Swamp

Known As Studying and Such, so she hopes her readers manage to get a little enjoyment out of it as well. Actually, she is rather surprised to find that her readers have not ditched her in favor of writers who are much more well-behaved in matters of regular updates. This phenomenon has had her scratching her head almost as much as the fact that her traffic stats have not only been constant, they are now showing results in really awesome places like Iceland, Brazil, and Malaysia. She had no idea H.I.V.E. was so widespread! (If only those anon people from countries she's only dreamed of would please drop her a line so she can mentally megahug them before unceremoniously splatting back into the SKASS, arms flailing all berserker-like.)**

Anyway, pigeonattack wishes to thank everyone for sticking with her this long, as Fanmail draws toward its final chapters. Naturally, when this project's over, she's got another one roosting on a back burner, ready to flap out and take to the clouds. In fact, her biggest project all year is already up and running, but you'll have to wait till the bottom of the page to find out what it is. Happy 12/12/12 (at least my timezone)! ;D

* * *

><p>Interlude:

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>

I Heart Helicopters

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Frankly, if pidge weren't pidge, she'd be getting pretty frazzled right about now.

For one thing, the chopper trip to Studio 254 SF was about as smooth a ride as the average wooden roller coaster. Female readers having ridden wooden roller coasters (or any equivalent automobile, horse, elephant, etcetera) should understand this reference completely. As a result, she spent about half the journey with several other Alphas shrieking out the open back hatch about stupid stupid air turbulence being a result of stupid stupid upset global weather systems being a result of unforgivable stupid stupid ocean temperatures rising. She spent the other half of the time repeatedly prying Kuno (otherwise known as the great Diamond Ninja) off of the cockpit controls (finally asking Otto and his skillzzz to figure something out), Franz off of the complementary snacks ("Those are supposed to last us five hours, man, not five minutesâ€|"), and various parachutes off of Penny, who finally tossed the whole lot out the hatch in despair.

Actually, if pidge weren't pidge, she'd probably have jumped out that back hatch, parachute or not, trusting the snow of the Colorado Rockies to break her five-thousand-foot drop.

Luckily, Tom, Shelby, and Fly figured out a fabulous way to keep things chill about midway through the voyage. She had to admit, they really knew how to throw a good party,

"Um, pigeonattack?"

Stomach-down on one of the many beanbag chairs strewn about the main cabin and slurping loudly on a juice box, pidge lifted her head to see Nigel standing next to her, looking extremely uncertain against a background of be-bopping Alphas marauding around to various genres of high-volume music. She wasn't quite sure how all the sound equipment had gotten onboard, actually, but whatevz. "Hey. How're you doing?"

"Alright. Thank you. Um, how long till we land?"

She checked her tablet. "Not long, actually. What, this getting too much for you?"

Nigel went a little pink. "Of course, not."

"Where's Franz?"

"I don't know, exactly. Last I saw he was at the snack bin. It's empty, in case you're wondering, but he's convinced there's gotta be one last package of something hidden down there somewhere."

pidge nodded approvingly. "Good thinking."

Nigel fidgeted, looking like there was something he wanted to say, and that something was squeezing onto the tip of his tongue for dear life shrieking "_No! No! No!"_

pidge frowned. "Hey, have a seat. I don't like being towered over."

Nigel opened his mouth.

"And don't even think about telling me I should be used to it by now, what with my just barely sub-par heighâ€"

"Actually, I was going to ask for something to sit. I mean, besides the floor, that isâ€|"

pidge paused. "Oh. That's an easy fix. OI, BEANBAG!"

A vibrant pinkish beanbag rolled over and settled by Nigel's feet.

"_Sit_."

Nigel made to sit.

"No, not you. Now, _stay_."

The beanbag barked.

"Good beanbaggy! Go ahead, Nigel. Here, have a juice box"

Nigel gingerly sat. "Thank you."

pidge rolled over and sat up, lacing her fingers like the sage of all shrinks. "So, Nigel, you must be terribly nervous forâ€"

"I'm not nervous."

"â€"your interview. Don't blame you one bit. However, speaking with all honesty, you've got absolutely no need. This interview's gonna be really chill. So chill."

A sudden gust swept through room, along with a really big noise. Tom had just opened the back hatch to empty.

Nigel shivered. "I'm chilling."

pidge tilted her head, watching Moonbeam step over to thump Tom on the back and pass him some napkins while Otto complained loudly about the cold and barf bags were invented for a reason and that he would personally push the next person who opened that door during this flight out into the middle of the Great Salt Lake, at the mention of which several PJO fans gasped "TEAM LEO!" in splendid unison, at which the few poor souls not in the PJO loop kneaded their foreheads.

Finally, the door closed.

"Seriously," pidge said, turning back to Nigel. "You've got no need to worry. Whatsoever. Your interview will be the easiest of all of them."

Nigel bit his lip. "With all due respect, pigeonattack, why should I believe you?"

"Ahâ€| well, for one," pidge ticked off on her fingers, "you don't have much of a choice." She barreled on before Nigel could completely smash his face deep into the beanbag. "Two: tell me who the final two interviewees are."

Nigel lifted his head slightly. "Shelby andâ€| Wing, right?"

"Please visually locate them."

"Now?"

"Yeah."

Nigel looked around, eyes settling on Shelby, who was one of those aforementioned be-boppers and had just shuffle-slid over to Tom's vicinity. Then Nigel looked over at Wing, who was sitting crossleggedly on a beanbag chair in a corner with his eyes closed, so one would have assumed he was meditating if his face hadn't been turned in the direction of the Wildest Partyer.

"Do you see?"

Nigel frowned, like a baffled client in front of an unfathomable crystal ball and a big purple lady with too many beads. "Umâ€| no."

"You do not see."

"No."

"Let's just say your dear fans have been pretty mellow. _C'est la calme devant de l'orage_, _non_?"

"The calm before the storm?"

"_Ah, tu parles le franÃ§ais!_"

"Not really. So, what are you saying? That my mail is really easy in anticipation of Wing and Shelby's?"

"_Exactemente._"

"Pardon me, but what's with the French?"

"I'm feeling annoying."

"Oh."

"Ahaha. Sorry. I probably got it all wrong, too. That brings me to reason number three: you need not worry because I will have to cut into your interview time a bit because I just remembered I have French homework to finish. Sorry."

"No worries." Looking considerably brighter, Nigel stood. "Thank you. I'll go look for Franz, now."

"You do that."

"WUm, just out of curiosity, what's that notebook you're pulling out?"

"French notes."

"That other notebook says, 'French'."

"Does it, now?"

"â€|yeahâ€|"

"I have two French notebooks. What do think this is, a ship log?"

"Um, noâ€|"

"Not all writers carry ship logs, you know. Anyway, see any fuel laying around?"

"What?"

"Forget it."

"Ooh, let me explain!"

"Franz!"

"Oh, hello, Franz! Yes, why don't you sit down and explain the concept of ships to Nigel. You can take my seat. I've got to go remind Otto to prepare for landing in an hour-ish. Hey, is he of age to drink in Britain?"

"Um, I don't think soâ€| but that's a ginger ale."

"Then why's he soâ€|?"

"He is being Otto. We are having no way of understanding him, you should be knowing."

.

Despite Kuno's very vocal laments about how they were going to hit aâ€| a lamppost or pine tree or baby stroller something with someone like this at the helm, Otto managed to land the chopper with relative control.

"I think it loves me," he muttered, dismounting seemingly out of thin air onto a shingled rooftop and blinking in the bright light.

"Gross," said Laura.

"Grow up."

"How do we know it's even a 'she'?"

"All vehicles of transportation are shes."

"Not literally."

"So?"

"Get a life."

"Look who's talking."

"You."

The four non-pod Alphas sniggered silently.

Studio 254 was in the penthouse of a lovely Victorian building in the heart of Hayes Valley, right by the serenely lovely Panhandle of Golden Gate Park. In the distance, the Golden Gate Bridge glowed in the late afternoon light. As everyone got out of the chopper, a hundred ridiculously divine smell wafted up to them, reaching around them in near-visible tendrils of bakery bliss.

"I am hungry. Are you not hungry? Hey, Nigel, you are hungry, too, _ja_?"

pigeonattack pulled out a silver card. "Moonbeam!"

"pidge!"

"I hereby bestow upon you the task of acquiring us a fabulous meal! Here."

"Ooh, shiny!"

"I know, right?" pidge took a moment to appreciate its shininess. "La Boulange on Hayes Street. It's not too far from here."

"Cool!" And with that, she dropped off the roof. No Alpha batted an eye.

"WHOA!" Fly, as it happened, had already infiltrated the complex, and was standing down on the balcony at the entrance to the studio. Everyone else quickly slid off the roof in that direction, landing amidst a small army of potted succulents.

"Ver-r-ry nice," Shelby said appreciatively.

Studio 254 was a blank room with pale walls and white carpeting almost completely covered by a rainbow of beanbag chairs in every imaginable shape. One of the walls was a floor to ceiling mirror, which conveniently made the small studio look twice as big. A small kitchen sat partially separated to the left. In the corner, a large futon was half-hidden under a pile of pillows, junk food, books, and various electronics. As they entered the room, it became apparent that the pile had two pairs of feet.

And then it exploded. And started talking. "pidge! pidge, pidge, pidge, oh my gods you're back! We've done a really good job holding down the fort, haven't we? Only Mouse has been too busy playing MegaRun to do much of anything and I've been really occupied myself with all sorts ofâ€"

"Mistletoe! My cuzzie!"

"Yup!"

"How are you, Mouse?"

"Good."

"I don't suppose we need any introductions?"

"Nah. We know all about all of you!"

There was a brief silence.

"Thatâ€| sounded really creepy-stalker-y."

"Shut up, Mouse. At least I'm saying it straight out, so I'm not creepy. Just stalker-y. Alas, all readers are, to some degree or another."

"Is that Nyan Cat music?" Laura finally asked.

"Yeah," said Mouse.

"Turn it off," Penny said, sounding a little strangled. "Turn it off right now."

Otto turned it off.

Mouse scowled. "Hey!"

Otto looked over at pidge. "Does that buy me any good cookies?"

"Certainly."

Eventually, everyone managed to settle into a comfy beanbag chair,

though Fly, Otto, and Tom spent an entire ten minutes hunting around for nice colors before they finally all settled on a lovely shade of azturpealean, of which there were three sizes that fit just right.

"We all ready?" pidge asked cheerfully, passing out the tablets.

"No! We are not all being ready! The food has notâ€"

"IT IS COME!"

Moonbeam made a magnificent silhouette, standing heroically at the glass door against the sunset sky with her glasses flashing white in the low sunlight, holding high a great tower of pastry boxes, which she set in the middle of the room, along with a stack of napkins. She held up an opaque plastic bag. "Hello again, everyone! Sorry I took so long. Someone called me and told me to get some funnel cake, blue cotton candy, and cookie dough iceâ€"

"ME!" yelled the futon, exploding again to retrieve its dinner.

Shelby teetered in her seat. "Oh my freaking gods those pastries smell amazing gimme oneâ€"

"Manners, Shelby," Wing scolded lightly, and received a thump on the head for his trouble as Shelby sprung up out of her seat and strode over to the doorway to relieve Moonbeam of her burden.

"_How_ you can even _think_ of manners at a time like this is utterlyâ€| oh, whatever. Here, have a muffin."

"Muffins for dinner?"

"Chill-lax, Wing, we're in Cali."

"NorCalifornians don't actually call California 'Cali', you know," pidge remarked.

"What would you know?"

"Eh."

"If you don't want that muffin, I'll take it off of you," Franz offered Wing.

"You can have it. I'll go with a brioche, if you have any, Moonbeam."

"Of course I do!"

"BRIOCHES!" Franz yelled happily, shoving the muffin entirely into his mouth and finishing his beeline for the bakery boxes, which were now in a rather haphazard pile as everyone caved, with the exception of the futon loafers, who seemed to live on a diet predominantly of strawberry pocky and boba tea.

Oddly enough, Penny seemed to hold back at first, watching the cornucopia bloodbath warily, but then she started diving in at

regular intervals to snatch up bits here and there.

"Good tactics," Kuno commented, following her example.

Tom giggled. "You guys are a pair ofâ€¦ likeâ€¦ squirrels or something."

"Tom, don't talk with your mouth full. You'll choke and I don't think you're insured outside of HIVE."

"Squirrels?" Kuno arched a single eyebrow. "Squirrels? Seriously?"

Tom shrugged. "Ahâ€¦"

"We're _brilliant_ squirrels. Not just squirrels."

"Flying squirrels!" Penny gasped. "Oh my gosh, I'm brilliant! You're brilliant! We're both so brilliant!"

Meanwhile, across the room, there was inevitable Final Croissant Situation.

Fly took one look at Franz, who was eying it around a mega-sized brioche, and lunged for it, screaming, "MINE!"

Franz sprang into action. "MEIN!"

"YOU'VE HAD SIX OF THEM, ARGENTBLUM, SPREAD THE LOVE A LITTLE."

"PHWAH. YOU'VE HAD SEVEN."

"I'VE HAD FIVE."

"SEVEN."

"FIVE!"

"SEVEN!"

"FIVE AND GIVE IT TO ME YOUâ€¦" AGH WING NO!"

"Here we go," Wing said, setting the croissant back down, now neatly split in half.

"Hey, wait!" Shelby yelled, barreling across the room. "I want one, too."

Sighing, Wing pulled out another croissant from a box hidden under a beanbag. "We can split this."

Shelby's eyes lit up like Christmas lights (=red and green and blue and stuff). Her arms promptly latched around his neck like a vice of friggin' huggle-doom. "You're so awesome, man, I don't even have wordsâ€¦"

"Ahâ€¦ thank youâ€¦ Please be careful not to squish the croissantâ€¦"

"Ah!" Fly and Franz sighed in unison, the croissant pieces laying forgotten between them for an entire three seconds.

Finally, the boxes were cleared and the floor was vacuumed and the beanbag chairs were told to go shake themselves out on the balcony.

"Now, are we all ready?" pidge asked brightly, as everyone returned to their beanbags of choice.

"No!" Tom was critically eyeing himself in the mirror. "This beanbag makes my butt look big."

"No one's looking at your butt, Tom."

"You can never be sure, Penny. Right, Shelby?"

"Don't flatter yourself, Tom."

"You don't deny!"

"Deny what?"

"Oh, don't play that."

Penny scooted over to tug on his sleeve. "Tom," she whispered loudly, "Shelby's taken. Don't even try. You might end up in bad physical condition."

"From who?" he asked innocently.

Kuno sighed, adjusting her glasses. "One of three people" _her_ "a flick-y gesture " _him_ " a swoopy-hand gesture " and, if you continue to interfere with our ship of choice, I might just do it myself."

"And me," said Moonbeam, smiling pleasantly and rolling up her sleeves. "I do not tolerate such uppity behavior."

"I'd chime in," Fly said, "but I must acknowledge the multiple possibilities of our colorful world."

"What the heck?" Penny squawked. "I thought you were a loyal"

"Hooray for multishipping!" Franz yelled gleefully. "And crackshipping! And shippers on deck!"

"If only you knew, you poor baby!" Fly said quietly, softly, gently, flicking through her tablet. "Oh, hey, you've got some pretty good stuff here!"

Nigel balked. "What?!" He whirled on pidge. "But I thought" you said" pigeon"

pigeonattack raised her hands, palms out and blameless-like. "Hey, I never guaranteed anything. Anyway, 'good' can go both ways, yeah?"

A contemplative silence fell, until Shelby (on her stomach with her feet kicking in the air and her chin propped up on her hands, and

encroaching dangerously on the personal beanbag of a dude who was currently staring up at the ceiling looking waaay too calm to really be calm) suddenly gasped. "Oooh! I _like_ this."

"PIGEONATTACK!" Nigel protested with an edge of desperation.

Tom hesitantly lifted a lusciously rosy little beanbag like a shield. "Where?"

"Shelby," Wing finally whispered quietly, keeping his eyes trained skyward, "would you like to take my beanbag chair?"

"Nah, I'm cool like this."

"Are you sure?"

"Yup."

"Wonderful."

* * *

><p>To be continuedâ€|

**â€|but the next chapter's actually already up elsssewhere.
XDDD**

Want to read some stuff of mine that hasn't yet hit ff? Go ahead and leave your Shelby mail in the review box here if you're in the mood to throw some random inquiries to be answered on Veritaserum , then head over to pigeonattack-dot-com to get the next chapter, and some extra brain deposits I haven't posted here yet. Subscribe if you like what you see (or just happen to be one of those people who have to be the first to read somethingâ€|). ;D

9. Amaranthine

To those who've already read Chapter Nigel at pigeonattack-dot-com, please see the note in bold at the bottom of this chapter. :D

* * *

><p>Chapter IX

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Amaranthine

-.-

Ignoring the streams of bubbly hearts subtle-casually emitting from their general direction, Kuno cleared her throat. "I'lll read first. Stop that wimpering, Nigel. This is pretty okay.

_Dear Nigel, _

Besides Franz, who out of the group do you consider yourself closest with?

Aranel Azamai."

Nigel bit his lip. "Umâ€¦ you're all my friendsâ€¦ Well, not _you_ four, of courseâ€¦" I-I mean, I haven't known you long enough to reallyâ€¦ er, this is awkwardâ€¦ Well, anyway. The adventures we've survived have bound us all pretty equally, I think."

"That'sâ€¦ surprisingly sweet."

"Please shut up, Tom."

"The next one," said Franz, "is from InvaderTor:

_Dear Nigel,
>Okay, Nigel, I just want to say that you are awesome. Seriously. The best advancement I've made in botany is growing a mini carrot. So here I go with my onslaught of complicated questions. What is the most awesome plant-creature you have ever made? Doesn't Gerard Way look like Otto grown up? I mean, when Gerard had white hair. Don't tell me you don't know who he is. Google images, people. Some of his fans are creepers, though. Ugh. And some of his songs are weird. But he seems like Otto. How did you react when H.I.V.E. kidnapped you? How do you think we found out about all this? What will you do when H.I.V.E. releases you? What is the most awesome prank you have ever pulled that no one ever found out about? What did you do before H.I.V.E.? Anything malicious?
Sincerely, Invader Tor."_

Nigel looked slightly lightheaded. "Erâ€¦"

"You _are_ very awesome," Franz said, possibly as a means of encouragement."

"Thank you... Um, Violet has to be the most awesome. I mean, n-not in the damage she didâ€¦ but really, have you ever seen so much raw, biological power? Erâ€¦ I don't know whoâ€¦"

Assistant Moonbeam showed him her Google Images search.

He tilted his head. "Maybe if you squintâ€¦ I guess? Um, what next? Oh, yeah. I was kind of freaked out when Hive kidnapped me. I have no idea how you guys found out all this, and frankly, I find it a little creepy and disturbing, but you get used to that, living in this world. I guess I'll do whatever Dad want me to do when HIVE releases me. I never pulled any awesome pranksâ€¦"

"Yes, you have."

"No I haven't, Franz."

"Uh-_huh_."

"Name one."

"The Venomous Tentacula. You told me you put it in that turd-face's lunchbox and then when he opened itâ€¦"

"I didn't even engineer that plant. I can hardly claim credit."

"You engineered a variant of the screaming Mandrakes as a backpack alarm."

"That's not really a prank. Andâ€¦ no. I really didn't do anything malicious before HIVE. I'm pretty boring." Nigel smiled apologetically.

Shelby raised an eyebrow. "You call VT lunchbox traps and Mandrake backpack alarms boring?"

Nigel shrugged.

Franz rubbed his temples, then excused himself to go make some popcorn.

"The next one's from Kukipye," said Laura.

"_So Nigel, are you and your dad, like, closer now? Cuz when you first came to HIVE, you seemed very bitter about him._

Question for general (anyone can answer this one really)... When you have classes in HIVE, I know sometimes it's mixed streams, but when they're not, will all the Alphas be in the same year and same intake? (Because in their latest adventure, 38 students were missing, and plus Franz, Wing, Shelby and Otto, that makes 42 Alphas in their year... but when they first had their first lesson with Francisco, it seemed like the students there were only from the intake Otto, Wing, Shelby, Laura, Franz and Nigel were in)

Aaand Nigel... were you very close to your mother like a Mommy's boy before HIVE, or did you go out with your friends and you know, have girlfriends and such? Since you mentioned you liked to work in the garden with your mom."

"Geez, these are long," Nigel muttered. "Dad and I are cool, now. I wasn't that bitter about _him_, per seâ€¦ It just kind of got tiresome being The Darkdoom Kid all the time, you know? Umâ€¦ I'm sorry, I don't really understand the question. I'm not sure I'd be able to answer it accurately, anyway. As for being a Mommy's boyâ€¦ Er, I don't think any boy my age in their right mind would straight up answer 'yes'. I did enjoy gardening with her. I hope that doesn't make me a Mommy's boy." He looked around quickly for some confirmation of his clearance.

Otto laughed out loud at the next one, then quickly wiped it from his face. "Ah, sorry. From Shnizel:

Nigel... Have you ever considered growing your hair? Because its useful for many things like keeping your head warm in the winter..."

"HIVE, for all its glitches, has a pretty reliable heating system, thanks," Nigel said a little peevishly. "And I wear a beanie when I need to work in the cold areas of the hydroponics dome."

Shelby grinned. "Ah, the next one's from Fly!"

Fly pumped a fist. "Woot!"

Nigel sank a little lower. "Ohâ€¦"

"_To: General people in the studio

>From: Fly

_Did anyone notice how Pinky didn't actually deny being a blondie?
wide grin I'm on to something!_

About Sakura-every single time I dared to raise my expectations, she crushed them. She's acting worse than Sasuke. And Sasuke's the one who's acting psycho-running off to Orochi-pedo after getting a curse hickey from him, running around half-shirtless, the whole Itachi-fiasco, proving that he's not happy unless he's getting vengeance...that awkward moment when Naruto suddenly becomes the sanest out of the trio.

And I don't really know who Prussia and the Poke-phobic are, but I know Ero-Sannin and...yep, white haired people are awesome. "I think we must expect great things from you Mr. Potter-um, Malpense. Terrible, but great."

Shelby paused. "Total agreement there, with the Sakura-thingâ€|"

"Hey, I like Sakura!" Penny protested.

Fly looked very satisfied, twirling a pink plastic knitting needle in one hand. "I rest my case."

Shelby continued.

"_To: N. Darkdoom
>From: Fly

Honestly, every time I think of you, I think of Nero's "Darkdoom? Darkdoom did this? Why is it always the bald ones?" quote.
>Epic XD<p>

ANYWAY. Moving on. I don't really have a question about your baldness. Or your lack of Alpha-leader-material. Or your relationship with Franz.

But what I DID want to know-
>DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE'S A SONG CALLED 'VIOLET' BY 'SAVAGE GARDEN'?
It's a good song.
>But seriously.
VIOLET.
>By SAVAGE GARDEN.<p>

WASN'T THAT OMEN ENOUGH? DID YOU HAVE TO GO AND NEARLY KILL EVERYONE IN BOOK ONE?
>It's always the bald ones, isn't it?<p>

But at least it resulted in that "Fanchu, get down!" Nero-and-Wing-not-shipping-but-still-sweet moment, so I forgive you.

Yep. You're awesome. That's it.

Without wax,
>Fly."<p>

pidge laughed slowly, collapsed on her back. "Once again, you've managed to upset everyone you mentioned, I believe."

"It's my job."

"Wait a secâ€¦" Franz said, returning with the popcorn. "What are you meaning by relationshipâ€¦"

"Answering the questions," Nigel said quickly. His face was considerably pink with a variety of possible reasons. "I don't know that songâ€¦"

Moonbeam played it.

"Oh. Er, yes, it is a very good song. Umâ€¦ What more can I say about the Violet incident? It was an accident. My fault. I'm really sorry."

Franz patted his back. "Chill. It is being okay now."

Wing, Shelby, and Laura looked a little ill.

Laura raised her hand. "What in the world do you mean by Nero-andâ€¦"

"Scarred," Shelby murmured. "Scarred for life."

Fly cleared her throat. "I could very well have just meant sweet as in like fatherly stuff."

Nigel scrolled down. "Wow. That's it for Fly's mail?"

"I told you it'd be relatively cake," said pigeonattack.

"That's so not true. This is not cake."

"A nice, sensible question from Fire," said Wing.

"_Nigel,
>Where do you see yourself in ten years?
Fire."_

"Working with Dad, I guess?" Nigel shrugged. "I have no idea. I'd like to be a bioengineer."

"Finally, from Wasp," Penny said brightly.

Nigel's eyes widened. "What?!"

"From Wasp."

"I mean, this is the last one? Are you serious?"

"Like I saidâ€¦" pidge began.

"I know you said."

"_Like I said_, as the interviewee precedingâ€¦" pidge checked to make sure Wing was sufficiently distracted by the ceiling and Shelby was sufficiently absorbed in boredly playing Cut the Rope "â€¦arguably the most popular ship on the fandom, you're getting it easy. Most of the reviewers just left nice notes without actually asking anything. Just wait till Shelby's mail starts coming

in."

"Thingsâ€¦ will be so beautifulâ€¦" Penny whispered, then straightened up seriously. "Which brings us to your final question, Nigel:

Nigel, I was wondering what H.I.V.E. pairings you ship. Please list all, and don't go all vague. â€"Wasp"

Nigel looked horrified. "EASY, YOU SAID?"

"I can help you jog your brain," Franz offered.

Nigel shook his head wildly. "Are you serious?! I'm going to be _murdered_ in my _sleep_!"

"Oh-hon-hon." pidge smirked. "So you _do_â€¦"

"Another shipper on deck!" Franz announced gleefully. "My own roommate!"

Finally slumping all the way down in the beanbag-ish cushiness, Nigel let out a long breath. "I'm not announcing them verbally."

"Fine," pidge sighed.

Knitting his eyebrows in concentration, Nigel switched to the notes app and slowly entered a list.

There were a total of two items.

"Oh, you're no fun," said Penny. "Those two ships are just soâ€¦ _duh_."

"Well, maybe that's the reason I picked them," Nigel said petulantly. "Problem? By the way, I'm not a shipper. I just sail, okay?"

"Sure, sureâ€¦ But seriously, that's it? Wingelby and Ottra?"

There were a few seconds of utter, deathly silence (+ Cut the Rope music, which kind of messed up the utter/deathly aspect).

Laura slowly lifted her eyes from her tablet. "What was that, Nigel?"

Nigel squeaked once and finally broke, diving under a big red and white polka-dotted beanbag.

"I. WILL. NOT. BE. A. PART. OF. ANY. 'SHIP'. YOU. WILL. NOT. 'SHIP'. ME. IF. YOU. GUYS DON'T. DROP. THIS. RIDICULOUS. 'OTTRA'. THING. I. SWEAR. I. WILL. _PERSONALLY_â€¦"

"Hey, hey, calm down," Otto said, looking a little resigned to this stuff. He got up to attempt to pull Laura off the Nigel/beanbag heap.

Finally, Laura relented with a frustrated "ARGH!" and Nigel slowly poked his head out.

"Sorry," Laura muttered.

"It's okay," Nigel said weakly.

"You know I'll never be able to look at you the same way again, right?"

"Yeahâ€¦ I kind of guessed as much."

"Hey, hey, what'd I miss?" Shelby said distractedly without looking up from her attempt to feed Omnom.

"Not much," pidge said cheerfully. "It's your turn, now."

Shelby's head jerked up, eyes wide as Ming Dynasty moon vases. "Say what?"

â€¦

To be continuedâ€¦

* * *

><p>This chapter was first posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. Chapter Shelby is already complete and posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. As I announced at pigeonattack-dot-com, there will be two Wing sessions. The first is for non-romantic questions. Please input your non-romantic Wing mail right here (limit 3 per review, please) if you're in the mood to harass our poor, hapless, oh-so-wonderful ninja buddy, then head over to pigeonattack-dot-com to read Chapter Shelby and some other stuff I haven't posted here yet, including a holiday one-shot and a few little teasers.

10. Cobalt

**For those who've already read Chapter Shelby on pigeonattack-dot-com, please see the note at the bottom of this page before shimmying over to pigeonattack-dot-com to read Chapter Wing.
;D**

* * *

><p>Chapter X
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**CObalt**
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"I said, 'your turn'," pidgey repeated patiently. "And luckily for you, the first one is easy as pie."

"Easy as pie," Shelby repeated doubtfully.

"Like Pinky Pie," Tom added helpfully, and got a round of odd looks for his trouble. "Erâ€¦ I'll read first. From WestOfTheMoonbeamâ€¦" Ah,

you don't mind, right, Moonbeam?"

"Do carry on.~"

"_So Shelby... How's life?_"

"Fine," said Shelby. "Mostly."

"I assume you've seen The Avengers? (aspiring supervillains such as yourselves have to keep up with the heroes of the day. I'll be disappointed if you haven't...)"

Do you think you could take Black Widow and what is your opinion of Loki?

Good luck..."

"Oh, phooey," muttered pidge. "I haven't seen _The Avengers_â€|"

"Of course I've seen _The Avengers,_" Shelby scoffed. "Nero had the whole school watch it and made us all write essays on the weaknesses of each character and each tactic and how we would exploit them stylishly."

"I figured," Moonbeam said politely.

"And of course I could take Black Widow. And Loki."

"Name rings a bellâ€|" pidge muttured, still too quietly to attract much attention.

"Next," said Penny, "from QuickSilverFox:

_Dear Shelby, well Hi really,
>If you could spend an hour in a lift with one person not in the room, who would you pick? Not sure if this question's been asked before but anyways...
What is your most favorite thing in the whole wide world?"
>

Shelby suddenly looked a whole lot more excited. "An hour in a lift? You mean an elevator, right?"

"No," said Otto. "A lift."

Shelby ignored him. "Oooh, I love these kinds of questions! Long lift ride, though. Unless the lift got stuck. In which case it'd be nice to have someone competent aroundâ€| but if it's, like, not-stuck, thenâ€| huhâ€|"

The rest of the company waited very patiently.

"Sherlock. Or Benedict Cumberbach. Hands down."

Multiple members of the company promptly fell over, eyes going all hearts-y in a very unbecoming way.

Fly's eyes glazed over. "Mmmmâ€|"

"Mmm-hmm," Shelby agreed happily. "And my favorite thing is when

people have good taste about such things."

"And now a rather long one from Foxface'sSpecialPie," said Nigel, casting a rather annoyed look at the majority of people and feeling a bad case of Out-Of-The-Loop-ness coming on.

"_1.) Have you read THG series? You are all so obsessed with MLP:FIM and POJ! What about The Mortal Instruments?

>2.) 20 words to describe Wing. Enough said.
3.) Biggest fear? And no I am not afraid junk because we all know you must be afraid of something,

>4.) Out of the people in this room, rate them 1-10 on awesomeness, personality, or (insert noun of your choosing here)
5.) Can you do anything no one else knows about? Like paint, dance, etc.

>6.) Last question, I swear. What is something you hope people would never find out? Come on, pidge said it was confidential!
Oh, and one last thing. A remark for each person! (Excluding pidge's friends)

>Otto: You. Are. Awesome! You are just awesome. Seriously. I am at a loss for words, which doesn't happen often. Wait, I found some words! astonishing, grand, mind blowing, impressive, magnificent, something else, and wonderful.
Shelby: You are cool. I admire your wit and ability to pick it up!

>Wing: I admire your strength and ability to keep calm. You are really amazing, big guy.
Laura: I like you, but get some guts! You are going to be tortured later because you don't! I admire your wit and would enjoy talking with you._

_Penny: You are...interesting. Seriously, drop the pink hair and the MLP obsession. You'll thank me later.

>Tom: You seem cool, but I don't really know you. But if you're friends with Otto, it's good enough for me.

_Goodbye,

>FSP"

"What, I don't get a remark?" Franz asked woundedly, as those who had received one looked pleased/bemused and said random _thank you_s and _you're awesome too_s.

"Get used to it," Nigel said tiredly.

"Of course I've read the _Hunger Games_ series!" said Shelby. "I've yet to look into _The Mortal Instruments_. As for twenty words to describe Wing "

Wing looked as if he was mentally steeling himself.

"Uh Tall. Male. Young. Asian."

"You've got to be kidding me," Kuno said flatly, subtly moving about in her seat.

"Not yet," Moonbeam told Kuno quietly.

Shelby went on jovially. "Intelligent. Not-bad-looking. Alpha. Student."

Tom sneezed.

"Fighter. Cool. Collected. Loyal. Honorable. Riteous. Obtuse. Oblivious. Annoying."

Wing, who'd starting getting a pink tinge across his cheeks, suddenly gave her a bemused look as she lay on his beanbag ticking off on her fingers (and toes, having run out of fingers) and talking to the ceiling.

"What? That honorable loyalty really drives me crazy sometimes. Anywayâ€¦ Sparring-mate. Friend. That's twenty."

Wing stared at the opposite wall, apparently not quite sure how to respond.

Shelby quickly moved on. "My biggest fear is mosquitoes. Especially the face-biters. Eurgh. I'd rather not rate peopleâ€¦ sorryâ€¦ I can sing. Would you like to hear me?"

"No thanks," Laura said long-sufferingly.

"Sure," said Otto, pulling out a camcorder from who-knows-where.

Obviously reconsidering, Shelby continued, "And I hope people never find out the password to my computer."

A dozen exclamation marks popped up in the room.

"Next!"

"From Fire," said Nigel. "Nice and sensible as always:

_Shelby,
>Where do you see yourself in ten years?
-Fire"_

"Sitting with the crown jewels," Shelby answered immediately.

There was a huge explosion from the futon on the other side of the room. "Oh, you did _not_ just say that. Stealing the crown jewels and posing with them Moriarty-style?"

"What?!" Shelby looked horrified. "Oh, heck no. No-no-no."

Tom started humming _"Stayin' Alive"_.

pidge shrieked something incoherent.

Tom lowered the volume.

"No, I'll be a lot slicker and subtler than that," Shelby assured them, taking a sip of water. "Next?"

Laura picked up her tablet, quickly scanning the next message. "Get comfortable, Shel."

"Hm?"

"You're gonna _love_ this one."

Shelby glanced at her sharply. "Whatâ€¦"

"From Aranel Azamai:

_What are your honest thoughts and feelings for Wing? And remember, there's no lying.

>Aranel"

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Shelby groaned, as Laura's mouth quirked€ and froze€ and then finally she burst into a fit of what might have been giggles on a girlier girl.

"Get on with it," Kuno intoned blandly. "Wait, no€ one sec€ " She got up, snatched up a beanbag, and hurled it at Wing's meditating head with the force of a thousand impatient bison.

Wing's eyes snapped open, tinged with the slightest edge of annoyance. "Yes?"

"You are to stay awake," Kuno informed him, tossing a mysterious vial of clear liquid up and down with one hand.

"Absolutely right!" exclaimed Tom. "Don't worry, you haven't missed too much€" we're just getting to the good part! Go ahead, Shelby€"

Shelby made a face at the ceiling. Perhaps it was insulting her in some unspeakable way. "What do I think of Wing? I've already answered this with that 20 Words thing."

"Sum it up," Laura prompted.

"Wing is a great guy to have around."

There were many implications. Quite a wide range. The present company of fangirls/boys mentally scratched their heads trying to think of a way to nitpick that statement.

Meanwhile, Shelby was clamoring for "Next, next, next!"

Fly looked pleasantly surprised. "You're that excited?"

And then Shelby made the immense psychological mistake of looking down at the tablet. "Oh, dear."

"I get to read! I get to read!" Franz practically pounced on his tablet.

"_To: Peeps in general

>From: Fly

"No one's looking at your butt, Tom."

>*squirms a bit* Um. Yeah. *nervous laugh* Duh, of course no one's looking...ehehe...(btw-that-beanbag-didn't-make-your-butt-look-TOO-big-just-sayin'-kthnxbai).<p>

I do acknowledge out shipping possibilities. For example, I do LOVE Wingelby, but I skip over to the Ottelby ship every now and then. Actually, I haven't written a real Wingelby yet, have I? But I HAVE written Ottelby.

>Hm. Maybe my conscience is telling me something.<p>

And, oh, the joys of crackshipping! My personal favourite crackship is WingLeon!
>[grips PinkPKNoDoom very, verrrry tightly. You know. Just in case.]"<p>

Tom blinked, checking out his butt. "Lolsaywut?"

"No!" Franz exclaimed, apparently horrified at what he'd just mindlessly read. "No, no, no, I will NOT stand for multishipping; it is a dishonor, a disgrace, aâ€"

"Whoaaaaaâ€|" Otto muttered. "I'm getting woozy all of a suddenâ€|"

"Seriously? SERIOUSLY?" Shelby looked ready to flip. As in, _flip!_ Like a coin. Out the window.

Both the Genius and the Wraith looked distinctly pissed.

Franz quickly moved on with determination.

"_To: SHELBY IT'S ABOUT FREAKING TIME ALREADY (Now that it's finally your turn, I almost forgot what I wanted to ask)
>From: Fly

7 questions (because 7 is a very magical number, duh). Not very long, I think. Feel free to answer them one by one.

Q1) Can I have Wing?"

"No," Shelby said immediately, then quickly backtracked as Otto's eyebrows seemed ready to bounce off his forehead. "It's my duty to protect him from annoying fangirlsâ€"

"Who says I even want him fangirl-ish-ly?" Fly pointed out, smirking.

"Everyone does."

"Meh," said Tom.

"Every girl, then, in half a right mind."

Laura tilted her head interestedly. "Are you in half a right mind, Shelby?"

"Of course I am."

"So youâ€"

"Of course."

There was a long silence.

Wing looked like he was trying to piece things together and very scared of the answer.

Suddenly, Shelby sat rigidly upright and dropped her cup (though luckily it was a sippy-cup so it didn't make much of a mess, but

pidge compulsively rocketed out of her chair and grabbed a dishtowel to protect her lovely beanbag chairs, anyway). "WHAT THE HELL-O DID YOU SPIKE MY DRINK WITH?"

"I didn't spike it with anything," pidge said immediately, looking up from her ferocious scrubbing. "I swear upon the heartless Styx."

Shelby gave her a long, searching look, then directed her attention around the rest of the room, scanning every face€" even the now-once-again-dormant Mount Futon.

Then, Moonbeam gave out a long, exasperated groan. "Oh, Kuno, don't tell me€|"

Kuno blinked. "Hm?"

"It's way too soon!"

"I'm the judge of that."

"She hasn't even signed the waiver!"

"What waiver? There's a waiver?"

"Of course! Right, pidge?"

pidge scratched her neck sheepishly. "Ah€| not yet?"

"pigeon!"

"WHEN DID YOU SPIKE MY DRINK WITH VERITASERUM?!"

"When you weren't looking," Kuno said easily. "Duh. Let's move on."

Franz, who'd been watching the proceedings with the amused air of a parakeet watching a ping pong match, happily complied.

"_Q2) How about Tom, then? Has anyone called dibs on him yet?"_

"Up to you, Tom," Shelby replied, resignedly falling back down onto the beanbag chair.

Which turned out to be Wing's.

Which Wing turned out to be sitting on.

Wing looked down at his lap in surprise.

Shelby blinked, then rolled off back to her own beanbag chair. "FML."

Tom, meanwhile, was eying Fly warily. "What exactly do you mean, exactly?"

Fly had gotten up to make more popcorn, and she was either shaking the bag really hard and really unnecessarily or laughing like a maniac.

Franz decided to continue.

"_Q3) Y U NO KISS WING ALREADY!_"

"Because Otto-teme is always skulking around!"

Silence.

Deathly
silence.

So-silent-you-can-hear-a-pin-sized-grasshopper-giggle-silent.

"Whoa, there," Penny managed. "So, like, if it was just the two of you in a broom closetâ€"

"That plot device is being _so_ overused," Franz complained, as Shelby looked about ready to launch the sippy-cup out the window. ("Don't bother with violent tendencies," pidge advised. "They'll only make things needlessly paperwork-y.")

"This does NOT mean anythingâ€" not!"

"What was that all about?" Nigel asked confusedly.

"I think she was trying to say 'This does not mean anything' but then the Veritaserum kicked in," Laura explained logically.

"THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M SAYINGâ€" NOT!"

"What do you think of these latest developments, Wing?" Otto asked, grinning widely.

"â€|"

"Oh. He's sleeping again."

Penny threw a pillow. "AWAKE."

"What do you think of these latest developments, Wing?" Otto asked again.

Wing looked slowly over at Shelby, who was attempting to roll up into a mean little ball, hedgehog-style. "I would like to hear more before making any statements."

"HE'S SCARED OF ME. OH GODS FLY WHEN THIS IS OVER I SWEARâ€"

"_Q4) My door has a non-magnetic deadbolt._"

Franz's timing was impeccable.

"_The windows have grills.

>The bathroom window is too small for a person to crawl through.
And my room is fourteen floors above the ground.

>If I lock the deadbolt, will you be able to break in without inflicting any permanent damage to my room? Because deadbolts can't exactly be picked, unlike other locks.
(This is a question I sorely need to know the answer to. I need to make sure my Ottelby

*cough*and WingLeon *cough* drafts are safe.)"_

"I WILL FIND A WAY."

Wing looked a little green. Otto gave Fly a long, long look, then finally broke it uncomfortably.

"Q5) Bug calls you Shel-bye. Comments?"

"Shel-_bee_", Shelby said tonelessly.

"_Q6) On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being Violet-level and 10 being Wing-level, how hot would you rate Otto?"_

"Hey, Violet was a lovely specimen," Nigel protested weakly.

"Nine."

Otto looked stunned. "Wow. Well, thank you." And then, as was inevitable, he got very smug. "Naturally, you'd think so."

"Shut up, Malpense-teme."

"Would someone explain this 'teme' thing?" Nigel requested.

"It's an endearing honorific," pidge explained.

"_Q7) What about Dr Nero? Where does HE lie on said scale?"_

"This is wrong on so many different levels," Shelby groaned.
"Nine."

"Whoa, wait a secâ€œ" Otto began concernedly.

"In Shelby's defense, Nero inevitably lands a high score, what with how many times he's obviously gone under the knife," Laura mused.

"Yeah. I think I'm done. *runs off to write last will and testament*

You make blonde awesome, Shel!

Without wax,
>Fly"<p>

"DONE AT LAST!" Shelby threw her arms to the ceiling hallelujah-like.

"Ah, wait, there is being another request," said Franz. "You're supposed to rate Wing, tooâ€œ|"

"Oh, well, _that's_ no biggie," Shelby said. "It's a scale with him at 10 by definition. Let's move on before I really lose it.

"As you wish," said Laura. "Next, a message from Wasp:

_Shelby,
>What are your feelings on how the fandom ships you? Most people ship

you with Wing, but a few times I've seen you shipped with Otto, Laura, OCs, and even Raven. Please share your thoughts.
Wasp"_

"WTF."

"Language, Shelby!"

Shelby made a rude gesture. "My thoughts on how the fandom ships me? Good grief, where to beginâ€¦ Shipped with Otto- dumb. Shipped with Laura- dumb. No offense, Laura, but I'm not of the Sapphic persuasion."

"No offense taken. Nor am I."

"OCs- uhâ€¦ no. Raven- not Sapphic."

"What's Sapphic?" asked Tom.

"Characterizing the ancient female poet Sapphos from the Greek island of Lesbos, from which we derive several words in the modern English lexicon," explained pidge.

"Ohhh."

"Next, next, next," Shelby said urgently.

"From Kukipye," said Tom.

"_You like Wing, yes? Admit it... [pokepokepoke]
>Anyway.

1) What do you think of a Otto/Nero pairing? (My sister's idea, not mine)

>2) Do you see yourself happily married to Wing in the future?
3) Do you think if Otto and Laura had kids their child would have pink hair? (Cuz obviously redwhitepink)

>4) I have never for the life of me EVER seen Shelby blush. Do tell us one time you did. Or tried not to. (Except maybe for that one yoga time...)
5) Anybody else think that the Rise of the Guardians Jack Frost looked EXACTLY like Otto so thus a heckalotta fangirls think Otto is hot? -

>6) Lastly... admit it! Admit you adore Wing! Otherwise you might as well just hand him over to the fangirls...<p>

Kukipye"

Shelby blinked.

She blinked some more.

"Do you need eye drops?" pidge offered politely.

"NO. OTTO/NERO NO NO NO."

"Thank you," Otto said gratefully. "For a moment, I was seriously concerned. I mean, with Nero, if anythingâ€¦"

"Number two," Shelby continued furiously, "I can safely say I DON'T KNOW. The average projected lifespan in the world we inhabit is not

exactly conducive to such long-term planning."

Tom gasped. "SHE'S BEEN PLANNING!"

"SHUT UP TOM!"

"Is it true!"

"Words, Wing?" Tom demanded.

"Shelby is quite right," Wing spoke up.

Everyone was briefly silenced.

Particularly Shelby, who gave him a brief sideways glance.

"Although," Wing continued seriously, "were we to mature successfully to such an age and find ourselves in need of a wife, I believe a marriage between the two of us would be quite agreeable." He trailed off, looking thoughtfully down at his cup, which he thankfully did not drop, as it was glass and very lovely.

A great many accusing/approving looks were shot Kuno's way. She shrugged. "Well, there you have it."

Shelby was staring at Wing with her mouth slightly open. "Why exactly, Wing?"

Wing answered immediately. "Good yin-and-yang mix."

"He's a downright romantic," Penny said drily.

"What he is saying," Franz explained urgently, "is that they complement each other. That is being very romantic."

"Would you guys MIND staying out of my lovelife?" Shelby complained loudly, and then decided to change the subject. "Next question: yes, I do believe Otto and Laura's kids are going to have pink hair."

Laura looked ready to throw another fit, but Otto quickly pointed out, "And similarly, you and Wing's kids would have puke-colored tresses."

"Yoga?" Shelby quickly continued, throwing him a very dark Thundercloud Doomglare. "Ohâ€¦ahahaâ€¦ geez, how do you guys find out about these things? Don't answer that. Anyway, that was not a blush. It was a simple change in pallor. I don't really blush, you see."

"Suuuure," Laura drawled. "Not even that time of month when you start mentally obsessing over hot ninjas for a good week and completely traumatizedâ€¦" Oh, hey, I think her Veritasium's wearing off, by the wayâ€¦"

"Don't even bother," Shelby said flatly, getting up to drop her sippy-cup in the sink. "As for Rise of the Guardiansâ€¦"

"DUDE!" pigeonattack exclaimed. "Jack-Frost-equals-Otto-Malpense

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I SAID! I even spammed Fly with the pic, I think."

"I love Jack Frost," Shelby said dreamily. "And he's about ten thousand times hotter than Otto Malpense!"

"Here's a reference," Moonbeam said, helpfully bringing up a pic on her tablet.

"I'm waaay hotter than that Frost kid," Otto announced. "Who even goes around in bare feet anyway?"

"Kind of reminds me of those hippies across the Bay," pidge commented, gesturing vaguely out the window. "Gotta love Berkeley peeps."

"And as for your last question/request!" Shelby took a deep breath. "What can I say? I'm an altruistic, self-sacrificing friend. I will gladly declare eternal love for Wing to save him from the horror that is the fangirl masses."

"!thank you!" Wing said uncertainly.

"Can we get this in writing?" Fly asked Shelby politely, procuring a very frayed and therefore very legit-looking scroll of parchment and a small grey quill readily dipped in black ink.

"Is that a pigeon feather?" pidge demanded.

Fly nodded grimly. "For the occasion."

"Indeed." pidge nodded. "Shipping is serious business."

Shelby was blankly reading over the verrrry long contract. "You know," she finally managed. "I never thought to ask what careers you people are going into, but I now get the sinking feeling at least one of you plans to study law."

Shrugging, pidge took a long sip of OJ. "Or maybe we're just really on top of things."

Shelby looked up slowly from the parchment. "And what if I don't sign this?"

"We toss Wing to the fangirls," Kuno said apathetically. "They're all ready and waiting."

Wing's poker face looked like it'd been poked.

With a huge, melodramatic sigh, Shelby scrawled her name at the bottom with a signature that must have actually been quite loopy and pretty on good days, then threw the whole thing at Fly, who caught it deftly and passed it to Kuno, who scrutinized it and then passed it to pidge, who waved it in the air to dry and then rolled it up tightly and passed it to Moonbeam, who swiftly procured a stick of sealing wax, lit a match, and finished the package.

The facility with which the process was executed was awe-inspiring.

"You guysâ€¦ you guys have a lot of experience with this, don't you?" Tom managed.

"Eh," said Kuno. "Next, from StarkidHufflepuff:

Hi Shelby! I see a lot of people asking how you feel about Wing and such, so I'll just skip that.

What I really want to know isâ€¦

_HOW did you learn to pick locks and steal things and such? HOW old we're you when you broke into a building for the first time? WHAT building was that?
>StarkidHufflepuff"

"THANK YOU FOR A RELATIVELY SANE ASKER!" Shelby gasped to the ceiling, throwing out her arms. "How did the Wraith learn her stuff, eh? Wellâ€¦ here and there, reallyâ€¦ There are a lot of good YouTube videos, actually. My first break in? I think I was a really little kidâ€¦ maybe even a baby, actuallyâ€¦ when my mom left me on the front porch while she was watering the plants and something in the house smelled really good so I just squeezed in through the doggy door."

"Oh, heck, no, that does _not_ count," Otto protested.

"Totally does."

"Does not."

"Does."

"Does not."

"Doeâ€¦"

"Children!" Penny exclaimed. "Hush! Next question, from Alpha Infinity:

_If everyone at H. I.V.E dyed their hair white and spiked it up like Otto's, then crowded around Nero's office door, how do you think he would react? Would he run back into his office screaming, call for Raven, or just freeze in his doorway like, "Malpense..."
>I thought it was hilarious. By the way, you're awesome."

"Huh. Good question." Shelby considered it. "To be honest, I think he'd just put it down to weird teenager stuff and take two Aspirin. And thank you; I am quite awesome, aren't I?"

"Naturally, naturally," Otto assured her.

"There's more," said Penny.

"_What's your favorite word? Mine is modnar (random spelled backwards)

>List 3 things you hate about each person in the room.
If you could figure out the deepest, darkest secret of anyone in the room, who would you pick?Why?

>Do you think the Naven pairing is sweet or disturbing?
If you could rename a month, which one would you pick? What would you rename

it?

>What's your favorite animemanga, if any?"_

"Whoa, that's a lot of questions!" Shelby looked slightly overwhelmed. "Good ones, thoughâ€¦ My favorite word is probably _chocolate_." She paused. "Three things I hate about each person in the room? Ahâ€¦ I think some things are better kept to ourselvesâ€¦ I wouldn't want to ruin this relatively pleasant mood, would I? Um, I'd be interested in Otto's deepest, darkest secretâ€¦"

"Why?" Otto demanded, alarmed.

"Coercion," Shelby said easily.

"Blackmailing shemer."

"Navenâ€¦ Nero and Raven? Ahâ€¦" Shelby looked at a loss. "Isn't he, like, in his eighties? And she's, like, in her thirties, right? Umâ€¦reserving judgement."

"But Nero _looks_ thirty," Fly pointed out logically.

"That's even more disturbing," Shelby decided. "Er, next question. Which month? June. I'd rename it Shelby Trinity."

Laura made a face. "Can you imagine that?"

"Waaay too much Shelby for one month," Tom agreed.

"And my favorite manga is probably _Shugo Chara!_, " Shelby decided. "Good art, cute storyâ€¦"

"It's soâ€¦ _shojo_â€¦" Penny muttered.

"And there's Ikuto-kunâ€¦"

Penny slowly nodded. "Yes, there's thatâ€¦ You certainly have a thing for Asian guys, don't you?"

"Asian guys win," pidge agreed.

"You're biased," Tom pointed out.

"I'm biased," pidge agreed. "Still. I mean, here's the proof." And she held out her arms like a ringmaster, indicating Wing. If there were spotlights, they would have been dancing around like crazy mosquitoes on fire. "Our next and final interviewee."

"I'm done?!" Shelby asked, shocked, and then very quickly elated. "Hallelujah!"

With gently held her shoulder to keep her from bursting through the ceiling in glee. "So it is my turn."

"Um-hm," pidge confirmed. "But we're going to be doing things a little differently with you, because you're a very special boy."

Wing regarded her guardedly.

"Two sessions," pidge announced. "All fanmail submitted now at for Wing will be regarding non-romantic matters. Please limit three questions per review. After that innocuous session/chapter, we will receive theâ€|_other_ questions."

Wing's face flashed with the hint of an emotion called _Oh, dear._

* * *

><p>This chapter was first posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. Chapter Wing Part 1 is already complete and posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. Please now input your Part 2 (=shippity=romantic-ish) Wing mail right here (limit 3 per review, please) if you're in the mood to harass our poor, hapless, oh-so-wonderful ninja buddy even more than he's already been harassed, then head over to pigeonattack-dot-com to read Chapter Wing Part 2 and some other stuff I haven't posted here yet, including a holiday one-shot and a few little teasers.

IN ADDITION, this Sunday, February 10**th****, the pre-Hearts-Day marathon kicks off on pigeonattack-dot-com with the first chapter of **_**Beware (the Days Before) the Ides of February:**_

_Otto Malpense is not, generally speaking, a romantic guyâ€| right? Which leaves Laura scratching her head wondering what the heck is going on in the days leading up to the 14__th__._

Five days.

Five updates.

You can subscribe at pigeonattack-dot-com if you would like email alerts (the V-Day fic will not be posted here on ff), or just pop in on the days leading to Valentine's Day.

Alsoâ€| I put a note about it at the bottom of Chapter Wing, also, but I'll just mention here thatâ€|

â€|**pidgey has just written something big.**

Verrrry big.

**Big**** big!**

!

Ahem.

**A-anyway, please check it out on the page that says "Burnt Corners" at pigeonattack-dot-com. There's a direct link to pigeonattack-dot-com at the top of my profile page here on ff. ;D

>

You're all awesome!

;)pidge

****Thank you for your patience. I apologize for having disappeared off the face of the earth without notice.**** ****The Merrily Mad Month of May is over. ****This calls for a party.****

****Readers of _Fanmail_ from pigeonattack-dot-com, please see the note at the bottom of this chapter.****

****I hope you were able to enjoy the V-Day Marathon at pigeonattack-dot-com! It's posted there under "Epics". ;D****

* * *

><p>Chapter
XI

.

Yin-Yang

—·—

"Wing?"

"â€| "

"Hello? Wing?"

"â€| "

"Wing! Oh, for goodness' sakeâ€|" Shelby tackled Wing out of the way and Tom's water bucket emptied exactly where Wing had been sitting just seconds ago, which was on the beanbag chair.

"â€|oopsâ€|" Tom looked sheepishly over at pidge, who sighed and pointed to the balcony. Tom nodded, picking up the beanbag and shuffling it out to dry. Hurrying back, he picked up a tablet and announced, "I will be reading first."

Wing sighed, gently prying Shelby off of his person.

Shelby sent a glare at Laura's raised eyebrows. "That was benevolence."

"Oh, can it, Shel. You both have alreadyâ€" "

"ALTRUISM. PURE ALTRUISM TO DEFEND HIM FROM THE HORRID HOARDS. No offence, buddy," she added to Wing.

"We'll see~," Tom said in a singsong voice.

"Oh, hey, I should mention," said pidge. "I'm not generously editing mail from readers anymore. I really don't have time for that on top of everything else that needs to be done, so yeahâ€| all typos in mail from readers are staying in."

Tom nodded. "Good to know. First piece, from QuickSilverFox:

_Dear Wing,

>I will try very hard to contain my inner fangirl until the romantic

chapter questions so please be grateful.
If you were a superhero, what powers would you have?

>What is your favourite lesson, teacher and random item in HIVE and why?
Now this question may be the hardest thing that you may ever have to answer so please take your time in answering it okay?

>*insert dramatic silencemusic/drumroll here*

>Pirates or Cowboys?
(I could've put ninja but that would have been a bit predictable I think so there you go!)

>Quick"

Wing blinked. "That was not too bad."

"It's the platonic chapter, dear," Penny reminded him.

Wing bit his lip, but Very Stoically went ahead with his reply. "A superhero? I would likeâ€| the powerâ€| wellâ€| Perhaps this will sound rather silly, but I would love the ability to pass through solid objects."

"Like a wraith?"

"Yes, Shelby, like a wraith."

"Like The Wraith?"

"Yes, Shelby, like The Wraith."

Shelby looked flattered. "How good of you."

"It is because I can do everything else already," Wing said humbly. "My favorite teacher? Erâ€| do Raven and her private lessons count?"

"Raven?" Otto half-shrieked.

"They are having a bromance goin', you know how it is," explained Franz.

"With regards to random items, I rather like her katanas."

"Total ninjaaaa," Fly whispered quietly.

"And I would rather be a cowboy."

"Naturally, on the side of the angels," Kuno remarked.

"Pirates areâ€| unclean," Wing explained. "From what I gather, most cowboys live lives of honor."

"And rescue pathetic damsels," said Shelby.

"Like you!~"

"MALPENSE."

Moonbeam drummed her fingers nervously on the edge of her tablet as Penny's hand shot out and barely restrained a very dangerously heated-looking Shelby. "We might need a straightjacket in hereâ€| Let's move on, shall we? From Aranel Azamai:

_Wing,
>Hmm, what has been your favorite memory at H.I.V.E. that we may not know about?
Aranel Azamai"__

"Oh. What a nice question." Wing looked ponderously pleased. "I greatly enjoyed my first experience working with Raven's katanas."

Tom's jaw dropped. So did several others'. "She let you _use_ those?!"

"Not the new ones, of course, but yes, I have trained with her conventional katanas on occasion." Wing looked like he was trying very hard not to look too immensely smug and for once failing rather terribly.

"Next question," Shelby said, failing even worse at trying not to look too immensely envious. "From Kukipye:

Ok, let's see. First off, I don't know WHY I'm not crazy about Wing like the other fangirls (I like Otto better, but that's probably cuz of Jack Frost. Then again I liked him better even before RotG came out soooo...).

Uh, never mind.

Wing.

1) In your free time before you came to HIVE, what did you do, other than martial arts and all? I don't exactly see you sitting around watching TV...unless of course you're like, doing Tai Chi at the same time...

2) Did you have any friends?! (I mean, not to be harsh or anything but just wanna know.)"

"Honestly, this Jack Frost twerp," Otto muttered darkly, the initial pleased expression he'd gotten at the compliment fading quickly.

"It is actually rather difficult to properly perform any form of concentrated mind-body technique without concentration," Wing admitted. "And I never really watched TV. Aside from martial arts, Lao was very thorough in providing me with a rigorous classical education. I did not know very many children my age, but he was always there, and he is decided closer to me than most people are to their friends."

"Like, on the level of us?" Otto asked.

"Yes."

"Ah."

"And then we have the perennially sensible Fire," said Nigel.

"_Wing,
>Where do you see yourself in ten years?
- Fire"__

"Married, with small children, and living in a nice, sensible life, in the suburbs" said Wing.

Blinks all around.

"Oh," said Kuno. "Well, that was to the point."

"Now the question," drawled Otto, "is _who_ exactly?"

"But that is only in my most hopeful dreams," Wing said quietly. "I do not think it is very feasible with our situations."

Otto shut up immediately and sank back into his armchair, looking rather depressed.

Laura awkwardly reached over and patted his back. "I'm sure we'll still be able to get married and have kids and" She froze. "Oh wait, that did not"

"come out the way you intended," Fly supplied for her sympathetically.

The rest of the company was looking at Laura oddly/amusedly/both-ly.

"I meant _we_ as in all of us," Laura said desperately. "Like, we'll all be able to get married to whomever we wish and have kids and"

"It's okay, Laura," said Shelby.

"Now that it is out, you will not be having to hide anything anymore!"

"Franz."

"It is being a good thing, you see?"

"FRANZ." Laura took a deep breath. "Just forget it."

"You don't want to get married with me?" Otto finally asked.

"I was speaking generally!"

"You're not answering the question."

"We're way too young for this!"

"Still not giving me an answer"

"Does that answer it?" Laura growled, brushing off her hands and storming back to her beanbag chair, where she collapsed on her stomach in a huff.

Otto rubbed his forehead. "I don't want to get married with you, either. Just so you know."

"Right," pidge said blithely. "Next, from Sage:

Hi, Wing!

1) Favorite color?

2) What are your favorite classes at HIVE?

3) Would you happen to be ticklish?"

"Hello," said Wing. "My favorite color is black. I have answered Question Two. I am not ticklish."

"LIE!"

"And how would you know?" Otto asked Shelby innocently. Shelby tensed. Penny, who had apparently someone become the de facto Shelby Restrainer, tensed.

"I tickle him sometimes."

"Oh godsâ€¦| mental imageâ€¦|"

"Tom," Penny chided quietly, "the archive has plenty of Wingelby fanfictionâ€¦"

"But none with that bunny!"

"That as it may beâ€¦|"

"NEXT!" Shelby declared.

"_Wing,_

_Back in Otto's chapter he mentioned that you sing in the shower and started to say what about. Please enlighten us as to what it is.

—

Wasp"

Wing blinked slowly. "I do not sing in the shower..."

"It's not honorable to lie," Otto informed him.

"â€¦|except when I am particularly joyous," Wing appended.

"And then you go all opera on usâ€¦"

"Only Verdi," said Wing.

"In _Italian._"

"And only _La Donna e Mobile._"

Moonbeam brought it up on Youtube [readers on pigeonattack-dot-com see sidebar ;D].

"Yeah, that's the one," Otto said brightly.

"So, no J or K-pop?" Shelby asked, sounding a little disappointed.

Otto scratched his head. "I don't think so."

"What a mental image that makes," pidgey sighed. "Wing in Super-J. Or SHINee. Your hair's a little too long, though!"

Tom cleared his throat. "Next question, from an anon:

Who would you like kill? How many ways can you kill somebody? Are you gay?"

"I'm not surprised they chose to remain anonymous," muttered Nigel.

Wing was looking a little upset. "There is nobody I feel the need to kill. Needless slaughter is something far too extensively glorified in our modern age. And how am I supposed to put a number on such a thing? One might as well ask me to catalogue the nuances of weaponry available and multiply that by the number of lethal points in the human body to the power of the angles of attack, which are infinite."

"You're taking this way too literally," Penny muttered.

"Ew, math," said Shelby.

"As a matter of fact, the very fact that I am reacting with such mildness to such insidious questions as the ones I have been receiving is an apt indicator of how reluctant I am to resort to violence."

"So, are you gay?" Tom asked.

"No."

"You know, if it didn't conflict with my OTP, I would totally be saying, _That is being what they all say, haha!_" Franz smiled benevolently. "However, it does conflict with my OTP."

"Wing has almost as many fanon ships as Shelby," Penny mused. "And I have none!"

"It's good to be a newbie," said Tom.

Laura looked like she'd given up on attempting to follow these lines of conversation. She seemed to be the only one left who hadn't yet caught on to Fandom Culture. Poor dear.

"pidge?"

"Yes, Wing?"

"I was rather under the impression it was only supposed to be non-romantic questions this round."

Shrugging, pidge scrolled down the tablet. "What you will. Fan-people will be fan-people, and there's really no stopping them." She paused. "Though I'm pretty sure I was very specific about the Three-Question rule."

"It's fine if they're one-word-answerable questions, though, isn't it?" asked Fly. "From Alpha-Infinity:

Okay, do you like frootloops? What is your favorite type of tree? Icecream flavor? TV show? Movie? Who do you care about most in the room? If you had never attended H.I.V.E, what would be doing? If one of you guys happened to turn against all of you because the people they cared about were being held hostage *nudge nudge wink wink* ,who do you think it would be?
>
And finally, for a grand finalie:
>Whats your favorite insurance company comercial?

Wing looked rather perplexed. "What areâ€"

"DON'T YOU COMPLETE THAT SENTENCE, MISTER!" Shelby interrupted, waving her arms. "Even _you_ must know what FrootLoops are."

"I don't."

"BLASPHEMY."

"I like sakuraâ€" cherry blossomâ€" trees," Wing continued. "They remind me of home when I see them in the Hydroponics Dome, even if they _are_ mutilated into odd postures or glowing blue. Vanilla ice-cream is very nice... I do not watch TVâ€" none of us doâ€"

Several sneezes reverberated off the walls.

"â€"and the last movie I watched was Ip Man 2, which was very goodâ€"

Penny squealed. "With little!Bruce Lee at the end! Gah!"

"â€"and I am sure there are many of us in this room with people we care about who are being held hostageâ€" I believe we all care about each other, for instanceâ€" to some degreeâ€" And as I do not watch TV, I unfortunately do not have experience with insurance commercials."

"AFLAC DUCK AND ANIMAL FRIENDS RAPPING IN A PARK!" Tom blurted.

"GEICO GECKO WITH SEA OTTER AND CLAMS!" yelled Shelby.

"That one's so old," said Otto.

"Well, I like it."

"You like anything with an Australian accent."

"So?"

"Like that diver from the Olympics."

"Mmmmmâ€"

"How exactly did you guys stream the Olympics at H.I.V.E.?" Kuno inquired.

Laura shrank in her beanbag chair. "Guilty. Next, fromâ€" Oh, for crying out loudâ€"

"From OttraWingelby4ev!" Franz cried gleefully. Laura looked like she wanted to hit a wall. Wing was impassive. Very fortunately for the world at large, Otto was too busy trying to remember the name of that Australian diver from the Olympics that Shelby was too busy thinking about.

"_1. Wing, are you gay with Otto?"_

Wing choked on air. "â€|_noâ€|_ Why would _anybody_â€|"

"You never know with fangirls," pidge said sagely. "All they need for fuel is two people who've spoken a few timesâ€" no, _onceâ€"_no, come within two miles of each otherâ€" no, share the same Earthâ€| no, _universe_â€| no, that's not even a requirement with crossovers and ERMAGADS pretty much anybody can be shipped with anybody and the shipping scene these days sometimes reminds me of those times back in elementary school where the teacher would put everyone's name in a bag and pull out pairs at randomâ€|"

She looked like she was getting a little worked up, so Fly grabbed her by the shoulder and steered her into the kitchen to take a few breaths into a brown paper bag (get the CO2 circulating and all).

"_2. Wing, do you want to have a girlfriend?"_

"Eventually."

Franz gave him a Knowing Look.

"I am an adolescent and pubescent teenaged boy," Wing explained. "It is no fault of my own."

"_3. Wing , What love song would you choose for Laura and Otto"_

"I do not know very many love songs," Wing confessed. "Would _BÃ©same Mucho_ do?"

Otto, as it happened, was still name-hunting, but Laura was very much awake and aware and to save everyone a lot of trouble she simple threw a beanbag to the ceiling and stormed into the kitchen to ask Fly for a brown bag of her own.

"Ooh, that's a pretty one!" Shelby gushed. "Nothing to do with Ottra whatsoever, but very pretty! Very hot and Spanish and hottt!"

"You repeated 'hot'."

"I know, Nigel."

"Next," said pidge. "â€|oh dear. I knew this was inevitableâ€|" She sighed hugely.

"What?" asked Kuno, scrolling down. "Oh. Well. This seems to be the Inquisition Re: Wing's Preferences section, doesn't it? From FandomFun:

1)Have you had feelings for Otto? (try not let Laura injure you)

2)Why don't you like to talk about your old family?

3)Where do you picture yourself in 10 years?

4)Do you think Otto and Laura should be boyfriend and girlfriend

5) What's your favorite color?

I've millions of questions but I don't think I should put all because I don't Laura to try to kill me but I have one final question.

6)If you had to marry someone in the room, who would you pick?"

"Why does everybody thinkâ€|" Wing massaged his temple.

"It's the long hair," Tom said sympathetically. "You're just _asking_ the shippers toâ€|"

Wing sent him an uncharacteristic Look that shut him right up. "The only feelings I have ever harbored for Otto are strictly platonic and in a brotherly manner. I do not talk about my old family because I feel no need toâ€|" not because I have something against the matter. I have answered the third questionâ€|" As forâ€|" well, I am not the best judge in these matters, butâ€|" He glanced around quickly to make sure Otto and Laura were still absent in some way or another. "Yes. I believe they would find it very nice. I have already said my favorite color is blackâ€|" and if I were to pick one person to marry, I would pickâ€|"

The very room itself (walls/ceiling/flooring) sucked in a breath.

"â€|"Shelby, of course."

"You _what who?_" Shelby half-screeches.

"You are the most compatible yin to my yang," Wing said simply. "And we could complement each other greatly."

"Compliment?" Tom asked, perplexed. "Not that I'm disagreeing, but that's a funny thing to sayâ€|"

"_Complement_," said Wing. "With an 'e'. Next question, please."

Still looking completely thunderstruck, Shelby picked up the tablet.
"From :

HOW CAN I BE LESS AWKWARD AND MAKE FRIENDS AND TALK MORE AND GET PEOPLE TO LIKE ME AND STOP BEING A COMPLETE AND UTTER FREAK THAT SPENDS ALL DAY ON THE HORROR MOVIE WE CALL THE INTERNET?

>TOR."<p>

Wing looked extremely confused. "Am I being asked for social advice?"

pidge nodded gravely.

"Perhaps spend less time on the internet?"

"Harder than you think," said pidge. "It helps to have a busy schedule that leaves very little time to waste. Start by filling up your weeks with non-electronic things you enjoy doing, such as biking or walking your dog or walking a pretend dog like my sister does (very good for you! Exercise without the poop-scooping! And since she's popular, she doesn't even look like a dork!)â€"

Mouse chose that moment to let out a very loud burp.

"â€"and awkwardness is really all about the attitude. It's a real psycholological block-thing, like in The Wizard of Oz: If you believe you can be confident, so you shall be. If you believe you are a freak, so you shall be. Start with the friends you have, and then branch out from there. It's surprising how many people there are in the same situation you're inâ€" worried and anxious about failing socially when really it's a lot worse to not have friends at all than to try to make some and then end up with just a few. If you're a good person, it's not very hard to not make friends. One way to start is by thinking about somebody whose social skills you admire, and then ask yourself throughout the day, 'What would So-And-So do?' You can't just 'get' people to like you without putting some thought behind it, no?" pidge paused and looked back at the long paragraph she'd just spoken. "Wow. I feel like a school-campus motivational poster. I should start an advice column. Should I start an advice column? Let's move on."

"The next oneâ€|" said Tom. "â€|Oh boy, it's Fly."

Fly grinned brightly.

"From Fly
OopsI'mLate:

_[OhmigoshohmigoshI'msososososoLATEthankyouthank
youthankyouforremindingme! *insert mental image of Fly running around like the snow rabbit from Alice in Wonderland, hopping about shrieking, "I'm late! I'm late!"*]_

To: Veritaserum consumers
>From: (a hysterical) Fly<p>

As the Candor would say...thank you for your honesty.
>(dissolves into fits of laughter)(again)<p>

To: Otto-teme (what an EXCELLENT way of getting past the censors!)

>From: (an annoyed) Fly (yeah, my mood changes that fast. I'm a Piscean, see)<p>

Get out. Give them both privacy.
>Hey, here's an idea. *innocent face* If Shelby's in your room with Wing, Laura will be alone. Why don't you go give her some company?"<p>

It was at that point that Otto finally gave up the sweep through his mental database. (He'd probably auto-deleted the data after the third consecutive day of general fangirling at H.I.V.E. over that dude and the other British diverâ€| Tom something or anotherâ€| Bailey?

Chaley? Dakins?) "I need my sleep, and the common area isn't actually that comfortable, so of course I'd overnight in Laura's room" "

And it was at that moment the Laura in question decided to walk into the room.

"You heard him, Laura," said Shelby, who'd tuned in right on time.

Laura slowly lowered herself to her seat.

Wing sighed.

"_Just stay away from bugging Franz and Nigel, okay? Otto-teme, you seem to love breaking up fantastic ships with your general obtuse obliviousness and no knowledge of when to give the lovebirds their space."_

Franz blinked. He was usually very good at picking up shippy cues, but this one was not clicking.

"To: Wing F.
>From: Fly<p>

*mouths wordlessly like a
jelly-which-you-American-peeps-call-Jell-O-I-believe*
>*squeaks like a goldfish*
wobbles like a mouse
>*mixes practically every simile in existence due to an extreme case
of fangirling*
(BRB-need to go compose myself. OHMIGAWWWDS WING
FANCHU THE HOTTEST THING AT HIVE AND THAT'S KEEPING IN MIND THE FACT
THAT HIVE IS IN THE MIDDLE OF A FREAKING ACTIVE VOLCANO
SQUEEEEEEEEEEE!)

Okay, hi, I'm back. *waves* I'm done fangirling.

Sorry, Shel, but when it comes to Wing, I AM a fangirl. BUT-I'm a Wingelby fangirl, too, and I've already professing my undying love for crackshippy!WingLeon, so don't worry, Q1 was only there for "Observe The Reaction" purposes.

Um. Hi, Wing.
>*ten minutes of some more extreme fangirling later*
Okay, I promise I've got it all out of my system /this/ time. You can't blame me. Fangirling is an integral part of fandom life.
>Plus, it's WING FANCHU. I mean, really. 'Nuff said.<p>

Anyway, right, three questions, three questions with no shipping...boy, this will be hard...

Q1) While we're on the subject of butts, on a scale of 1-10, how much would YOU rate your derriere?"

Wing frowned. "It is perfectly functional, so I give it a ten."

Fly shrugged. "Figures."

"_Q2) Can I have your autograph? Preferably on a napkin you've used. Sheldon got Leonard Nimoy's autograph on a napkin he used and he was thrilled.

>(But that was because he got a sample of his DNA, which he could use

to clone Leonard Nimoy and create his very own Leonard Nimoy. But that's not why MOI wants a used napkin oh no perish the thought...)"

Wing shrugged and looked around for a pen, which pidge kindly provided him with. Fly looked beside herself with glee.

"_Q3) Yeah, I know, fangirls can be really, really annoying. I'm holding back, I swear. I haven't jumped you yet, have I? And I haven't tried to rip your clothes off you, either. Nor have I looked into cloning technology and asked for a DNA sample so that I could...actually, forget that one._

My point is, fangirls be crazy.

>My QUESTION is, which would you prefer?
-Being forced to attend the annual Wing Fanchu Is Bringing SexyBack Conference (yes, it's a real thing) shirtless?

>-Or watching all five Twilight movies back-to-back? Twice? With the excellent soundtrack replaced by Justin Beiber ft. Rebecca Black?<p>

I'd take the fangirls. I mean, I'd rather be mauled than lose my sanity, but it's a personal choice, I guess.

Thanks so much for putting up with me for so long!
>Without wax,
Fly"

"â€|" Wing rubbed his neck. "I do not know very much about the Twilight movies, and Option One sounds rather worse."

"TWILIGHT. THOU HAST RUINED MY PERCEPTION OF A DEAR AUTHOR." pidge was breathing hard again. "You know that Christina Perri song? 'A Thousand Years?' One of my favorite stories EVAR referenced it. And it was beautiful. And I got feels every time I listened to it. And then I found out it was written for _Breaking Dawn._ AND NOW I WANT TO CRY."

Moonbeam reached over to pat her back.

"I WANT TO CRY CRY CRY."

"Don't fret," said Kuno drily. "The non-romantic mail's done. It's time for theâ€| _next_ batch, isn't it?"

pidge's dropping head shot straight up. "_Is_ it, now?!"

* * *

><p>To be continued...

* * *

><p>This chapter, Wing Part I, was first posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. Chapter Wing Part II (the shippity chapter, yay!) is already complete and posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. As I announced at pigeonattack-dot-com, now that we've finished with the students, we're going to be cordially inviting the faculty over to Studio 254.

**The first vict- gues- _interviewee_ is, by unanimous decision, the

beloved Natalya Raven.**

Please submit your mail for Raven here, then scoot over to pigeonattack-dot-com to read **Chapter Wing Part II (the shippity chapter)!**

Congratulations to everybody for surviving another school year!

12. Yin Yang Yay

Heyyy. I have thirty thousand excuses, and therefore, via Dumbledore logic, I have none. Please forgive me for this wait. I genuine love writing this silly little story so much, and I always look forward to every early morning awoken to add a few lines to Chapter Raven, and it's paid off: Chapter Raven is now up at pigeonattack-dot-com.

I made a big push this week to haul this out. Why? Because yesterday was the third anniversary of my first posted story on fanfiction. I look back and giggle my head off, but the truth is that as a lil' barely-teen, I put my heart and soul and passionnnnn[fruit] into everything I wrote. Everything. And seeing people like my stories? That wasâ€" and isâ€" and always will be, through all the turbo-powered pushes of academics and general growing up into my responsibilitiesâ€" the best thing ever.

* * *

><p>Chapter XI

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Yin-Yang Yay

-.-

It was a weakly-disguised fact that everyone but Wing and Shelby (gods know why) had been awaiting this.

Really awaiting this.

Awaiting this like a classic baddy swirls around in a sleek black wheely chair and says, with that most terrible of evil grins, "I've been awaiting you."

Or "expecting".

Whatever.

"But wait!" cried Shelby. "There's something that needs to be addressed! From Mosgem:

_To: Wing

>I really didn't want to ask you a question. Could you tell Kuno to tell Moonbeam to tell Pidge to yell at Fly so she can get around to making Dear Alpha's?
Thanks,
>Mos."

Wing opened his mouth to reply, but pidge waved him down. "Don't bother, Mos and Fly have already started a collab on that thread, which is very full of hijinks and madness and therefore not safe to read in science class."

Fly blinked. "You read during in science class? I thought you were smarter than that."

"Apparently not."

Kuno cleared her throat. "And now that that distraction's taken care of and Shelby has no more excuses to delayâ€"

"But wait!" cried Shelby. "Iâ€ I need to use the restroom. And you can't start without me."

"Can't we?" Penny begged. "My legs are falling asleep."

"Mine, too," Shelby said happily. "We should all take a walk to stretch our legs."

"It's really amusing to me how much more worked up you are about this whole thing than the actual subject of the questions," Moonbeam remarked.

"That's because I am the de facto subject of most of these questions!" Shelby flipped over in her beanbag and glared at her reflection in the wall mirror.

"Do you still need to pee?" Otto asked. "Because that position must be horribly uncomfortable for your bladder."

"ARGHHHHH."

"She gives up," Laura announced.

"Very good," Franz praised. "I was knowing she would eventually be seeing the light. I shall be going first. From QuickSilverFox:

To Wing

>I have two questions for you:
What do you think of all the pairings people have for you but I have to admit WingxLeon is a new one :P

>And the final question: Marry me?
Thanks"_

"I am going to channel my inner Rock and stoically not say a thing," Shelby intoned.

Otto delicately mopped up the last of the milky milk he'd snorted down his front at the mention of his S&E guru. "Your inner Rock Lee? Baaad idea."

"ONE MORE NARUTO REFERENCE AND I SWEAR, OTTOâ€|"

Wing seemed to be attempting to mentally recover. "Meâ€| with a _cat?_"

"Hey, it worked for Amu Hinamori," Penny noted.

"I think it is very safe to say I shall be keeping my limits within

my species, thank you."

"So, exact same set of 46 chromosomes?" asked Tom.

Wing paused. "I do not like where you are going with this."

"Whose side are you on, anyway?" Shelby demanded of Tom.

"I should ask the same of you, Shelby."

"I am not well enough aware of all the otherâ€|_pairingsâ€|_ people include me inâ€|"

"Would you like to be aware of them?" Charlotte offered helpfully, scrolling through a spreadsheet open on her tablet. "You're pretty much shipped with everyone you've ever spent more than two minutes with, as well as more OCs than should physically fit in HIVEâ€|"

Wing was looking a little sick.

Kuno plucked a barf bag out of the air and shoved it against his face.

"And no, I deeply apologize, but I will not marry you," Wing said muffledly into the bag.

"Next," said Nigel, who apparently liked the relative innocuity of the next question. "From Kukipye:

_Ohhhhhh hi Wing. Didn't see you there. As usual. But I see you now, so...

>(I sorta expected the 'Lao' answer... shoulda totally added a "people who are around your age" part. However then all your answer would be is "No.")

1) In how many ways can you compare your mother to Shelby? And tell us what they are...!

2) What type of wedding would you want? (Hopefully not the walk in and register then walk out type. Besides, I don't think Shelby will entirely go along with such a simple one...)

Bye! (Maybe there'll be an epilogue party...)"

"Epilogue party, eh?" pidge stroked her chin. "Might be some potential in that ideaâ€|"

"I don't know whether I think this mother question is sweet or creepy," Shelby muttered. "But what I do know is that any wedding of mine, regardless of the groom, is going to be BIG and BOLD and BRIGHT and a freaking BONANZA."

"With bananas," said Otto.

Shelby narrowed her eyes. "Is that supposed toâ€|"

"No, bananas and bonanzas just kind of go together in my head," Otto explained. "But that's true, the connection between bananas andâ€|"

"MY LITTLE SISTER IS PRESENT," pidge bellowed.

"Right," said Otto.

Wing coughed. "Shelby and my mother both have and had a great sense of justice and righteousness."

It took the rest of them a while to realize he'd just answered one of the questions. Shelby looked pleased. "Why, thank you."

"Other than that, I am afraid I do not remember very much. She was seldom around. In any marriage, I would wish for as quiet and friendly a wedding as the bride would see fit."

"That's a marriage material guy right there," Tom advised the general public. "Next, from Alpha Infinity:

_OH MY FUDGING GOD SHELBY LIKES SHUGO CHARA! I LOVE SHUGO CHARA!
faints on floor

>*Struggles to get back up to ipod* Anyway, you guys are lucky to get the good asian. The one at my school is really annoying, though he has super sexy hair.
The other day my sister was like "Do you like Otto?" And was like ew no. Then she asked the same thing about wing and i said no. So now she thinks that I'm infected with the Non-fangirl fever. Now my question, hmmm I've practically forgotten it but:_

Would you send your kid with Shelby to H.I.V.E?

For some reason nobody has asked that so I thought it was unique. My sister Alpha Five came up with that one, and her friend Alpha Three came up with one but that best remains unknown.

Ciao"

"And now I don't know whether I want to high-five you for your good taste or punch you for your ridiculous notions," Shelby told the air.

"By 'the good Asian', you mean me, right?" pidge asked blithely.

Crickets beatboxed.

"I have not yet decided whether or not I would wish my ostensible lifestyle upon a child of mine," Wing said, ever to the point. Ish.

"You did not address the 'with Shelby'!" Franz cried.

Wing sputtered. But not really. Because he was Wing and all. "How am I supposed to addressâ€œ"

"Hold up!" Penny called out.

The session was paused as a portion of the present company pitched in to help unearth an unwilling blondie from the bottom of a fortress of beanbags.

"I'M PERFECTLY HAPPY HERE, THANKS!"

"Grow up," said Otto, yanking her out. "Next, fromâ€" you guys come up with the most creative names, reallyâ€" WingFanchuLover:

_Dearest wingy wing,
>Do you just so happen to have a identical twin brother who's single and into brunettes?
Give him my number...
>Lots of lurve,
Me"_

"Yes, yes he does," Fly blurted, holding up a picture ofâ€|

Neji Hyuuga.

Crickets rapped.

"Close enough," Fly muttered, stowing the picture on the desk. "Quick question from Alpha Infinity for pidge:

Alpha Infinity 2/18/13 . chapter 10

_Hiiii!
>Before you end the story, can you PLEASE do majority questions? You know, questions not for one individual, but all the H.I.V.E students. Pretty please?
Thats all I had to say
>Alpha Infinity"

pidge scratched her head. "Maybe if there's enough interestâ€|"

"Interest!" Penny said.

"Interest!" Tom echoed.

Nigel looked away. "It would be nice to go back to our normal livesâ€|"

"That settles it," pidge said, nodding to him. "We're all staying here for a big group round. Then, in response to popular opinion, I'll see what can be done about getting Max and Raven over here. Max's long-lost brother's fiancÃ's nephew is an old friend of mineâ€|"

"Nero has a long-lost brother?" Laura asked in surprise.

"Well, according to the long-lost brother," said pidge. "He's a good guy. Next, fromâ€|"

A resounding _beep_ echoed around the room.

"Censored?" Wing asked politely.

"Yes. Anyway, this person wants to say:

Dear Wing,

I gotta say you're cool. The books don't say that (although its pretty obvious) But seriously you are awesome. Now here are my questions.

1. Do you ever feel like Otto's pretending to be the boss? I know he's a genius and all but he has got to be pretty annoying sometimes.

2. Do you like Shelby? (I don't care if I'm in the romantic session or not)

Well bye! Hope my English is good. P.S. I wasn't thinking when I named myself"

"I don't _pretend_," Otto said immediately. "I _am_."

Shelby nodded. "Classic twerp psychology."

"What the heck is _that_ supposed toâ€"

"Otto is a very capable leader," Wing replied calmly. "I feel safe knowing I can follow his instructions and not have to take any of the stress of leadership onto myself. That being said, he does get pretty annoying sometimes. As for question twoâ€|"

"Here we go." Shelby collapsed backwards and rolled off her beanbag.

"I like Shelby very much. We have been friends for a long time."

"â€|I knew you were going to BS something like that," Otto muttered.

Shelby rubbed her eyes.

Wing looked almost satisfied. But not really.

"Which brings us perfectly to our next question!" Fly leaned back and crossed one leg over the other, taking on the look of the classic Shrink. Like, John Watson's Shrink.

"From Aranel Azamai:"

_Dear Wing,

>It has already been made pretty apparent that you like Shelby. So, why do you like her?
-Aranel"_

Wing breathed out, leaned over, and rested his elbows on his knees. "I like Shelby because she is kind (mostly), empathetic (usually), (always) confident, but (typically) not a swaggering ego; she's always been there for me, alwaysâ€"

"Oh my gods stop right now you're sounding like one of Mouse's sappy romantic clichÃ©s," pidge said breathlessly.

"Hey!" shouted Mouse.

Meanwhile, Shelby was looking at Wing with a rather dazed expression. Her eyes were almost shining.

Almost.

"What's with all the qualifiers?" she demanded.

Wing shrugged. "I had to take you off the pedestal and represent you as the human being you are."

"Oh," said Shelby, in a very small voice. "Well. The next set of questions comes from JustMeMyselfandI."

At the nonplussed expressions, she explained, "That's the asker's name."

_Hi Wing!

>Even though I would like to, I don't have all my questions as a romanticfangirl theme, so you can thank me later._

1) How tall are you? I know you're tall, but HOW tall?

>2) Unicorns or Narwhals? Take your time, I know this is a hard question.
3) Out of everyone NOT from HIVE around you, who do you like best?

>4) If you could rate Shelby's awesomeness on a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the best, what would she be? And WHY haven't you made your move on her yet!? Jeez. She's isn't getting any younger over there.
5) Oh! If you were not taken to hive, what would you do when you "grew up?" (Tokyo U?)

sigh

>well, MM&I is out!"<p>

_ "For a moment there, I thought you said M&M," pidge remarked. "Yum."

"Sounds really good right now," Fly agreed.

"Around six feet." Wing was going ahead and answering. "And&unicorns? I'm afraid I don't know very much about narwhales& Why would anyone ever&|"

"It's a meme/trope/internet-thing that I first came across two years ago," pidge explained. "I didn't know it was still around."

"Out of everyone not from HIVE& well, I thought they all were HIVE students."

"We are," said Moonbeam. "Just not the same way you are. Let's rephrase the question to: 'out of the people you met today for the first time'."

Wing nodded. "I must say, without offense to anybody else, Mistletoe strikes me as the most reasonable."

All other non-normal-HIVE-students went Cold and Distance.

Wing looked uncomfortable. "This is simply based upon my biases, which include the fact that she has contributed the least to the ongoing festivities."

"Well, then," Mistletoe said happily, surfacing briefly from her pile of pillow-snack-game-debris, "I shall continue not-contributing."

"I don't think people like Shelby are supposed to be limited to a 1-10 scale," Wing continued. "But she would be a 10."

Shelby blinked, then went slightly pink, then looked away. "I'd say something like, '_Don't be ridiculous'_ if I didn't already know I'm a 20."

"And her biological clock's a-ticking," Otto added.

"I've got plenty of years in me, thanks," Shelby spat back. Then she seemed to reconsider. "Not thatâ€| " She looked distinctly uncomfortable now. "Not that that means people should drag out the courtshipâ€|pre-courtshipâ€|dancing around the bushâ€| whateverâ€| "

Wing put his head in his hands. "The reason I have not 'made any moves'," he said slowly, sounding as if he was trying very hard to maintain his composure, "is that at first I was scared. I could not lose one of my closest friends, the person who means the most to me in the entire worldâ€""

"Hey, I thought that was supposed to be me!" Otto protested, then gave a little screech as Kuno and Fly both jumped up, grabbed one of his ankles each, and dragged him into the bathroom. Moonbeam deftly turned the key and tossed it to pidge, who tucked it under her beanbag.

"I hate it when people ruin the mood," Fly growled vehemently. "Otto's getting off easy."

Wing cleared his throat, Stoic Statuary Face back in play. "And now that I have decided upon my course of action, I would prefer to enact on it when there _aren't_ a roomful of junior super villains and various decently-concealed cameras and wire taps scrutinizing my every move."

"So what is this course of action?" Franz asked excitedly.

Breathing hard (whether from irritation, frustration, or Emotional Overdrive it was hard to tell), Shelby picked up a beanbag and hurled it at Franz's head.

She missed.

Nigel ducked.

It smashed a random ceramic pot in the corner of the room.

"You're paying for that," pidge intoned.

Franz gulped. "Okay. I am getting the message. I will be silent now."

"In response to the last question," Wing said strainedly. "I am sure I would have gone to university and gotten a respectable business position. Or perhaps joined the Japanese NPAâ€" the Nationalâ€""

"Police Agency." pidge nodded. "You'd have interesting colleagues there."

"â€|Wing as a police officerâ€| working alongside Matsu and

Aizawaâ€¦" Penny sighed, leaning back in her beanbag. "What a wonderful worldâ€¦"

"I'll read next," Laura offered. Apparently, the awkward-tension-anticipation-confusion-elation-really-messed-up silence was starting to make her fidgety. "From Mistletoe:

_Hiya!

>Ying yang was beautiful (really you should add a comments section then I can spam you on 3 different websites :D) erm...
yay so wingleby craze chapter coming up (so excited)
>ahhh -sigh- I have my popcorn and blue candy at the ready...
OOOOOOOH can I ask dear Wing some questions?
>oh gods he's probably super hot (hehe hi Shelby...) not as hot as fanon Draco... *ahem*
so... This should be pretty easy..._

1) Matt Smith or David Tennant? (please, please, please tell me you've watched Dr. Who...)

>2) If you had to break up with Shelby (just let's say it'll happen...), how would you tell her?
3) What are you going to do on your first date with Shelby? (sorry Shelby dear, but the bathroom is definitely calling to you... *cough cough*)

Hi Shelby! No worries, I'm far too much in love with Benedict Cumberbatch to chase Wing (he's all yours ;D)
>AHHHHHHH! SOOOO EXCITED FOR THE STAR TREK MOVIE AND THE HOBBIT (SMAUG AND BILBO)!
fangirl squealing ah...

Well this became a rant rather quickly... Three last words
>House. Of. Hades.<p>

Mistletoe"

"Fanon Draco?" Penny asked interestedly.

"Still think Mistletoe's the most reasonable?" Mouse called out to Wing.

Mistletoe whistled, hidden from view.

Wing shifted uncomfortably. (This whole ordeal seemed to be one big Discomfort for him, the poor dear.) "As I said, I do not watch televisionâ€¦"

"Matt Smith!" Shelby bellowed, at the same time Penny shrieked, "David Tennant!" and pidge shouted, "Benedict Cumberbach!"

"Umâ€¦" Moonbeam did some quick research. "I don't believe Benedict Cumberbach has everâ€¦"

"Well, he should."

"This is ridiculous," Wing muttered, looking at question #2. "Within two minutes of being forced to declare undying love the Shelby, I am being told we are going to break up?"

"Nothing's actually happened yet, so this is all hy-po-_thetical_," Laura explained patiently.

"I would probably leave her a card with a bouquet of flowers, but

honestly, why would anyoneâ€¦" He trailed off, two inches from Perilously Thin Ice. "As for my first dateâ€¦"

"What the heck does that mean, 'the bathroom is calling to you'?" Shelby demanded. "In the first place, I don't see Wing dragging me to any clubs where I might find use for a toilet, and in the second place, I come from a proud line of American mavericks who can party hard and hold their alcohol, thank you very much."

"So Shelby says, 'clubbing'," Franz decided. "What are you thinking for a first date, Wing?"

"I said nothing about actually going clubbing," Shelby pointed out. "I just said it in the way thatâ€¦"

"I believe a nice musical would be a pleasant first date for anybody."

"Like Cabaret, maybe," said Tom. "That's a nice, respectable musical."

"Yes," Shelby said sarcastically. "And Cats is about chihuahuas."

"We should all go see Billy Elliot sometime," Otto said randomly.

"Ooh! Billy Elliot!" pidge lit up like a glow stick.

"As for the rest of your message," Wing said apologetically to Mistletoe, "I'm not quite sure what to make of it."

"Eh," Mistletoe said. "Don't worry about it."

"Next," said Nigel. "From FreakyMe24:

To: All

>From: Me
I have to say, I wish I got off my lazy bum and asked questions earlier. (darn. I missed the Ottra section.) But, just in time for the Winglby section! Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

>Sumimasen. Sorry. Fangirling alert.

To: Fanchu-senpai (since you're older than I am)...wait change that to Trinity-san. (TeeHee! Didja get that?)

>From: Me
Wing, when I picture how you look, sometimes I come up wit Yuu Kanda from D. Gray Man. Is that weird? It is, I know. Seriously, why did I? He's like 18. And more mean. So, I have questions. Very long ones. Mostly about hair. Weird, right? : (Gopher Face! (from Soul Eater!))

Q1- Why do you keep your hair long (not that it isn't cool or anything, just wondering)

>Q2- Since everyone in the room knows that you like that certain blonde (who I have to say, is pretty awesome!), I won't ask you that question. It's obvious. What would happen if Shelby had a boyfriend that WAS NOT you? (Would you sulk for days? Try to break them up?)
Q3- What if, when you and Shelby were dating, she changed her hairstyle? Would you take that as nothing, since she is american (don't kill me!)? OR, would you interpret it as a break up, as most

boys in Japan do?

Is it weird to like the word "hemoglobin"? Whatever...
>Spreading the Love (Or possibly ruining it)
Freak"

"It's refreshing to be addressed properly," Wing said finally. "Thank you for thatâ€| erâ€| Freak-san."

"Wing keeps his hair long because it's a memento of his twin brother, Neji Hyuga," Shelby explained.

She was probably hoping everyone would go off topic talking about Naruto and subsequently forget-

"Three guesses who this 'certain blond' is," Otto sang. "I'll give you a hint: it ain't Mihael Keehl."

"I would hope not," muttered Tom.

"Yeah!" Penny agreed. "Mello belongs withâ€""

"I keep my hair long," Wing said loudly, "because that is the way I am used to it."

"Makes sense," said Franz. "But not really."

"If Shelby had a boyfriend who was not meâ€""

Several people helpfully filled in at once.

"HIVE would blow up," said Franz.

"He'd be respectful," Nigel murmured, "knowing Wing."

Nobody heeded Nigel, of course.

"He'd cry in the shower. I've witnessed such things."

"Say what, Otto?! You've witnessed Wing crying in the shower?"

"Lots of times."

"_In the shower?"_

"Sure, Penny."

"_You've witnessed Wing in theâ€""_

"Well, when you say it like _that_â€|"

"I would be respectful," Wing said very, very loudly. "And happy for them."

"Called it," Nigel said softly.

"If Shelby changed her hairstyleâ€| Well, that would be nothing unusualâ€|"

"I know, right?" Shelby chirped, flipping her parting line to the other side of her head.

"And I do not think liking any word in particular is weird."

"I like numbers," Otto said brightly. "My favorite is 0110. Next, from Guest:

HI HIVE PEEPS!

Hi! I have a question for Otto. Do you think you are hotter than...say...Leonardo DiCaprio? Freddie Stroma? How about Alex Pettyfer? But, you can not top Wing. Seriously dude. No chance at all.

OMG. WINGLBY CHAPTER. Wing. And Shelby. (BTW, don't worry Shelby, you'll be together eventually...oh...and I think you should...step out and breathe some fresh air...) Wing, have you had your first kiss yet (Is it really that important?)? If not, would you give your lip-virginity to the awesome blonde over there? *wiggles eyebrows* How would you want your first kiss with Shelby to be like?

I wonder if there could be a movie about you funny fellows.

>Byeeee!
Just a "Guest"

Otto paused. "This is supposed to be Wing's session only, but lucky for you, I'm in a good mood, so I'll tell you that I don't just_think_ I'm hotter than them all. I _know_ I am."

"I'm sure you could even top Wing if you really tried," said Tom.

"Pfft. I don't know what these fangirls think, but I've been topping him since the dawn of remembered time."

"How did you put up with this guy for so long?" Laura whispered to Penny.

"Well, how did _you_ put up with this guy _and_ fall in love with him?"

Laura scowled. "Don'tâ€"

"Oh, please. You're digging yourself into a hole, you've _been_ digging yourself into a hole, just give up now and turn back while you still can, okay?"

Laura frowned at her feet.

"Lip-virginity?" Wing asked warily. "Is that what people are calling it now?"

"That sounds dirty!" Tom breathed.

"I have not felt the need to kiss anybody in a romantic manner," Wing announced. "When I am ready for my first kiss, I would prefer it be when and where there _aren't_ a roomful of junior super villains and various decently-concealed cameras and wire taps scrutinizing my every move."

"That sounds familiar," Otto noted.

"Next, from a different Guest," said Tom.

_ "Shel, I gotta say, that ALL the Geico Gecko commercials are awesome. Although, MetLife has some good ones with the Peanuts Gallery. Charles M. Shultz is supreme comic master!
> So wing, who's the girl? You said you wanted a girl friend eventually, so who? hmm? Is she blonde, sarcastic, and similar to Maximum Ride? (Don't need to answer. We know it's true.) And I'll hazard a guess to say she is the same girl who you want to marry, right? When you have kids, how many, what names, and how would they look?"

Wings voice went strained once more. "I believe we've already covered the subject of _who_â€|"

"And I am NOTHING like Maximum Ride!" Shelby exclaimed. "For one, she's has brown hair and wings."

pidge couged. "You, like Max, prefer the tall, dark type. You, like Max, have a Wing."

"And I think the question is less 'how many times you'll make babies' than 'how many times you'll almost but not quite make baâ€'" "

"MY LITTLE SISTER IS PRESENT," pidge boomed.

"Sorry," Otto said not-sorry-ly.

"No more than two children," Wing said slowly, subtly glancing at Shelby for confirmation.

"Whoa, watch him subtly glancing at Shelby for confirmation!" Otto squealed.

Wing sucked in a breath.

"Tell me, Otto, can you sing?" Shelby asked brightly.

Otto tilted his head. "Sing? Why? I thought we've alreadyâ€|"

Shelby smiled like the sun itself. "One more of those 'married couple' comments out of your mouth and you will no longer be able to father your own line."

Otto looked like his mouth had gone dry. He scooted to the far side of the Beanbag Circle and stayed there.

"I don't get what Shelby just said about singing," said Mouse.

"Good," said pidge.

"I do not know how to answer your other questions, Guest," Wing said apologetically. "I suppose the names would be something quiet, simple, elegantâ€|"

"Yeah, sounds good," Shelby agreed, throwing Otto a threatening look when he opened his mouth.

"I do not know how they would lookâ€¦"

"Assuming Wing has no blond/blue-eyed ancestors, the offspring should have dark hair and dark eyes," Nigel dared mention.

Wing tilted his head. "Oh?"

"Mendelian genetics," Nigel muttered. "Works with pea plantsâ€¦"

"So no dark-eyed blondies and blue-eyed ravens?" Penny looked disappointed. "Fandom interpretations of genetics are better than real genetics, dammit."

"The next one looks familiar," said Kuno. "From Wasp:

_Wing,

>If you had to ship the eight H.I.V.E. students in that room into four couples what would they be?
Wasp"_

"Haven't we done this?" Nigel muttered blearily.

Wing fidgeted. It was very un-Wing-like. "Must I?"

pidge sighed. "The fandom dictates. Thou must. And I think Wasp refers to the people you knew before today."

Wing fell back on his beanbag and covered his eyes. "Penny and Nigel."

Nigel shrugged. Could've been worse.

Penny reached over and ruffled his hair. "Not to be creepy, but we'd be so cute!~"

"Laura and Otto."

Both sighed. That was a bit of a given. Didn't make it any less awkward. Otto was considering caving into the little cupid-voice at his shoulder just to get rid of this awkwardness alreadyâ€¦

â€¦along with achieving o-other thingsâ€¦

"Shelby andâ€¦ m-meâ€¦"

Shelby blinked.

"It is the only sensible option!" Wing rushed to say.

"Eh," said Tom, not looking very convinced. Then he blinked. "So that leaves me and Franz!~"

They bro-fisted very manly-like.

"See, that's the problem with uneven gender distributions," Fly remarked. "Almost makes you wish Hissy-Voice was still here. Oh, look, the next one's mine!"

"Oooh, me me me!" Penny snatched up her tablet.

_Q1) How strongly do you believe in gender-roles? You know, the whole

"boys should ask girls out and make the first move" thing?_

If you do believe in them, WING KISS SHELBY."

Wing looked extremely taken aback. Finally, he managed, "I do not think we should subscribe to gender stereotypes because that just sets the cause back fifty years."

"If you don't, SHELBY HE'S A TOTAL GRADE A NIMROD PLEASE I BEG YOU KISS HIM."

Shelby was too busy staring at Wing. "I detect a reference somewhere in what you just said, and it's driving me crazy not putting my finger on it."

Penny coughed. "Perhaps we should move on."

Q2) We have Otting and we have Raving. Personally, which would you prefer? Or at least, hate less? Because, the way thing are going, Wing, I think they both have a better chance of happening than Wingelby. Do something, man!

*twiddles thumbs in the background, waiting for Wing to jump Shelby...or the other way round* I'm gonna be here for a while, right?"

Wing took one long, deep breath. He took two long, deep breaths. Finally, he stood composedly, walked over to Shelby, knelt down in front of her, and took the back of her neck in one hand.

Then he pressed their mouths together.

The static in Shelby's head was palpable.

"I am sorry it had to be under such circumstances," Wing murmured, drawing back.

"Don't apologize," Shelby trilled, and promptly fell over.

"And that," Penny declared. "Is one way to ship a stoic. Put 'em in all the right situations, and the effect is goose egg, but question the stoic's interests, and _Boom!_ Chemistry, serving right up!"

"Is that all the questions? Fantastic! I'm out of here!" Otto made it about halfway to the door before Kuno got up and kicked him back into his seat. "Oof!"

pidge stretched. "I dunno. Maybe we should drag this out a bit. You're all already hereâ€¦ I think it might be interesting to bring Nero and Raven into the party while we're at it."

"Oh!" Otto's scowl flipped right upside down. "So, do _they_ get to answer questions and stuff?"

"Yeah." pidge looked like she was warming up to the idea. "Maybe we'll get some of the teachers, too. Who do we want?"

"Pike!" Laura exclaimed. "Professor Pike!"

"Ms. Leon!" Shelby shrieked. "Oh my gods, get Ms. Leon!"

"I wonder if she travels in a kitty kennel," Tom mused.

"Ms. Gonzalez!" Nigel suggested. Nobody heard but Moonbeam, who nodded to him and made a little note.

"COLONEL FRANCISCO," bellowed Franz.

"Are we forgetting anyone important?" asked pidge. "Yes? No? Alright. I'll radio the forces." She lifted a mouthpiece to her mouth. Ahaha.

Four seconds later, a swarm of gray blocked out the sun.

She looked around pleasedly. "So, who gets to be the first victim?"

The roar shook the rafters. "RAVEN!"

Nodding, pidge added, "I should mention. The questions will probably be all about you guys, you know."

The jubilant expressions froze like glaciers.

* * *

><p>To be continuedâ€|

* * *

><p>This chapter, was first posted at at pigeonattack-dot-com. Chapter Raven is already complete and posted at pigeonattack-dot-com. Please submit your mail here for our next fab interviewee, Professor Pike, then shimmy off to pigeonattack-dot-com for Chapter Raven!

Hope you're all having a happy first month of 2014!

End
file.